DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 596 EA 030 756

TITLE	Selected Readings on School Reform, Winter 2000.
INSTITUTION	Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-01-00
NOTE	141p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1627 K Street NW, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20006. Tel: 888-823-7474 (Toll Free); Fax: 202-223-9226; Web site: http://www.edexcellence.net.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Selected Readings on School Reform; v4 n1 Win 2000
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Standards; *Accountability; *Charter Schools; *Curriculum Problems; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; Public Schools; *School Choice; Scores; Teacher Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

This collection of selected readings includes articles on the following subject areas: federal issues; charter schools; school choice; standards, tests, and accountability; teacher quality; curriculum and content; higher education; and miscellaneous subjects including absence in the classroom, school consultants, urban education, and principal vacancies in New York City schools. A "Network Notes" section contains short commentaries on various education subjects. (DFR)

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FORDHAM

Selected Readings on School Reform

Winter 2000
Vol. 4, No. 1

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January 2000

Dear Education Reformer,

Welcome to the first $(SR)^2$ of the new millenium. We hope that, before opening its cover, you have already completed our little survey (enclosed with this mailing) so we can benefit from your thoughts about the future of $(SR)^2$. If not, kindly do so now. Then keep reading.

There's plenty here that's worthy of your attention. In *Front Lines*, you will read that the ranks of the education reformers are swelling: organizations like the Education Commission of the States and individuals such as National Urban League president Hugh Price have recently come out with new declarations of support for "charterizing" the whole system. The "New Democrats" are making interesting noises, too.

Another must-read section is *Standards, Tests and Accountability*. The long-predicted backlash against standards-based reform seems to have begun. Faced with test-based evidence of weak performance, a growing horde of parents and educators is beating up on the standards and accountability arrangements instead of the system that is producing the bad results. And some teachers, perhaps unable to contend honestly with new accountability measures, have been found cheating for their students. Several articles in this section amplify on these troubling developments. And, of course, *The State of State Standards 2000*, also enclosed with this mailing, gives you our latest take on which states are and aren't doing well at developing good standards and installing serious accountability systems.

We hope you enjoy this issue of $(SR)^2$ and thanks in advance for providing us with feedback on the survey. See you in a few months.

Sincerely,

Chester E. Finn, Jr.
President

Kelly Amis

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Program Director/ Editor

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Network Notes

Choice & Charters

Choice and Community: The Racial, Economic and Religious Context of Parental Choice in Cleveland

A new report prepared by Jay P. Greene for the Ohio-based Buckeye Institute disproves one of school choice opponents' favorite allegations: that choice will lead to increased segregation. Greene's study (prepared in conjunction with the federal courts' current examination of the program's constitutionality) shows that the Cleveland voucher program actually fosters racial integration as well as economic and religious diversity within schools. (It should be noted, however, that the vast majority of voucher-accepting private schools in Cleveland are religious.)

On the whole, Greene points out, private schools participating in the choice program are better integrated racially than their public school counterparts. Whereas only 5.2% of public school students in Cleveland attend schools that match the racial make-up of the metropolitan area, 19% of participants in the voucher program attend such schools. The *majority* of public school students in Cleveland attend schools that are almost entirely white or entirely black. Indeed, it seems difficult to imagine a system more segregated than the one we have now.

Choice and Community can be obtained online at www.buckeyeinstitute.org or by calling Buckeye at 614-262-1593. — *KLA*

An Evaluation of the Horizon Scholarship Program in the Edgewood Independent School District, San Antonio, Texas: The First Year

Paul Peterson, David Myers and William Howell, under the aegis of the Harvard Program on Education Policy and Governance (PEPG), have published a report on the first-year (1998-99) evaluation of the large, privately-funded voucher program in Edgewood, Texas. It's in two short volumes, the second being a data appendix prepared by Mathematica Policy Research. Because the Edgewood program offered to aid any or all low-income youngsters in the school district, it did not practice any kind of random selection. Hence the evaluation design relies on comparisons with children in similar school districts (and with the districts themselves, as "district effects" are a major interest of this large intervention project). These two initial volumes provide baseline data about the Edgewood youngsters who are participating in the program and some comparisons with other Edgewood students. The focus is on demographics, opinions, background characteristics and initial test scores. For the most part, participants resemble the non-participants, although there are some non-trivial differences. (Participants' families are less poor, for example.) This report provides no results but will nonetheless be interesting to those trying to stay abreast of important school choice research.

The pair of reports is numbered PEPG99-03. Contact the Program on Education Policy and Governance, Taubman 306, Kennedy School of Government, 79 John F. Kennedy St., Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138. Phone 617-495-7976, fax 617-496-4428, or surf to www.data.fas.harvard.edu/pepg/ — *CEFjr*

The Impact of Parental Choice on Three Canadian Public Schools

Daniel J. Brown of the University of British Columbia has prepared this study of choice in British Columbia. It's based on a policy of providing "alternative" schools within the public school system; some 10,000 B.C. youngsters are enrolled in such schools. This study of three of these schools examines their origins, missions, delivery methods, student characteristics, and evidence as to their effectiveness. One of the three schools studied specializes in Japanese language and culture, plus technology. The second emphasizes "direct, purposeful instruction and high expectations for student content and performance." The third (and newest) of them is a parent-initiated "traditional" school that stresses "academic excellence and a disciplined environment." Here are some of Brown's findings:

*They have remarkably strong organizational integrity.

* Student achievement is at a high level, particularly for the traditional schools, relative to others in their districts.

* Levels of student and parent satisfaction are strong.

* The schools benefit from a high degree of parent involvement.

* They offer equal educational opportunities.

Brown concludes that "parental choice makes an importance difference in the lives of children, parents and educators." Maybe you knew this. But here's evidence from our great Northern neighbor, albeit evidence gathered within the public school system.

For your own copy of this 130-page study, contact the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, 201-1451-B Ellis Street, Kelowna, BC V1Y 2A3. Phone 250-717-1163, fax 250-717-1134, e-mail Hraham@direct.ca, or surf to www.saee.bc.ca. NB: The Society has published or republished several other recent studies on education that you may obtain from their website or by e-mail from Helen Raham at the address given above. — *CEFjr*

Charter Schools in Action: Renewing Public Education

Back when yours truly and his colleagues were associated with the Hudson Institute, you may recall that we undertook a multi-year study of the then-revolutionary charter school phenomenon. Underwritten by the Pew Charitable Trusts, and staffed by (among others) Bruno Manno, Louann Bierlein and Gregg Vanourek, we produced a whole series of studies and reports. Shortly after you read this, the very last of these will emerge in the form of an honest-to-God book, published by the Princeton University Press, co-authored by Bruno, Gregg and myself. We respectfully submit that, at least for a while, this will be one of the defining works on charter schools. It explores many aspects of them, including their relationship to civil society, the problems they face, the challenges that will shape their future, and what an all-charter community would look like. (This last is especially germane to those who read the recent school-governance report of the Education Commission of the States and the excellent essay by Hugh Price of the National Urban League.) We hope you might want to see for yourself. Its title is as given above. Its ISBN number is 0-691-00480-3. The price will be $27.95. You can check with your local bookstore or contact the Princeton University Press at 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey, 08540 USA. The website is http://pup. princeton.edu/ — *CEFjr*

School Choice in the Real World: Lessons from Arizona Charter Schools

The charter school explosion in the United States is still new and not well understood. Though there have been a number of accounts of successes or failures of individual charter schools, on the macro-level there is as yet little to be gleaned. *School Choice in the Real World* thus helps fill an important void.

It's a collection of essays about the effects of school choice via charter schools on students and schools alike, using the Arizona charter experience as a case study. The book's authors provide a mix of vantage points and opinions. From Robert Stout and Greg Garn, we learn, for example, that charter schools do not necessarily produce innovative curricula. On the other hand, Arizona Superintendent of Schools Lisa Graham Keegan writes that charters have wrought nothing less than a revolution in Arizona education, broadening options for parents and forcing regular public schools into earnest reform.

School Choice in the Real World will interest anyone wanting to know more about charter schools. It is published by the Westview Press (www.westviewpress.com), 5500 Central Avenue, Boulder, CO 80301 and costs $65. You can contact them by phone at 800-386-5656 or by fax at 303-449-3356. — *JRP*

Competition in Education: A 1999 Update of School Choice in Massachusetts

Since the introduction of charter schools in 1993, and contrary to everything we thought we knew about its political leanings, Massachusetts has become something of a hotbed of school choice activity. By 1998-99, charter schools served 9,930 students in 34 schools. (Well, OK, not exactly a hotbed, in a state with nearly a million kids in school, but certainly an active site.)

Competition in Education, issued by the excellent Boston-based think tank, the Pioneer Institute, focuses on the effects of this charter school proliferation on Massachusetts's public schools. Author Susan Aud concedes that it is still too early to witness wide-scale reform in Massachusetts public schools as a result of charter schools, but predicts that charter schools will likely have this effect in districts where they are prominent. She bases this prediction on an earlier study of the effects of Massachusetts's open enrollment policy, also conducted by the Pioneer Institute, that found that the more money a district loses to other schools through choice programs, the more likely it is to institute reforms, combined with the fact that charter schools are taking a much greater percentage of funds from many districts than open-enrollment policies.

To get a copy of *Competition in Education*, call the Pioneer Institute at 617-723-2277 or visit them at www.pioneerinstitute.org. *Competition in Education* is White Paper No. 6, released in September 1999. — *JRP*

Financing Charter School Facilities in Pennsylvania

A lot of people are interested in how to ease the facilities crunch that many charter schools experience, due to the fact that those who grant their charters rarely provide them with buildings in which to operate their schools (and, under most state charter laws, their budgets consist only of operating funds, not capital funds). With help from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Charter Friends National Network has prepared a short "policy brief" aimed at the Pennsylvania situation. Written by Amy Berk Anderson and Bryan C. Hassel, this nine-page document sketches what several other states have done and outlines several approaches for Pennsylvania's consideration, mostly involving tax-exempt bonds and loosening the strings on what charters can do with their operating budgets. Interested readers will also want to have a look at *Paying for the Charter Schoolhouse*, another publication of the National Network. That organization can be found on-line at www.charterfriends.org and phoned at 651-649-5479. Mr. Hassel can be found at 704-370-0357 and Bryan_Hassel@publicimpact.com. Ms. Anderson can be reached at 303-494-3720 and aba@xpert.net. Bruno Manno of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is also glad to help: 410-223-2983 and BrunoM@aecf.org. — *CEFjr*

Standards & Tests

Teacher Preparation Assessment: The Hows and Whys of New Standards

Published by National Evaluation Systems, Inc., the nation's largest creator of state-specific teacher tests (as opposed to the uniform, ETS-produced Praxis series), this 280-page book is a compilation of papers presented at the group's October 1998 conference on teacher certification testing. This event focused on linking certification tests to new teacher standards.

The thirteen chapters that form the meat of this book are all accounts of individual states' efforts to tackle the teacher quality problem. While some useful initiatives are described—California's efforts to ensure that teaching candidates are exposed to research-based reading instruction methods, for instance—most of the reforms being implemented sound like more of the same old stuff. The new standards and assessments may be better than the old ones but there have been no real efforts to determine exactly how (and if) they are linked to effective teaching, defined as producing more student learning. The overview and policy pieces included in this volume call attention to the frequent mismatch between what teacher training institutions do and what actual K-12 schools need, yet most of the authors seem convinced that the solution lies in creating better standards and assessments. Those who believe that teacher standards and tests are not the best tools for distinguishing good teachers from bad will find little to sink their teeth into here.

Teacher Preparation Assessment: The Hows and Whys of New Standards can be ordered from National Evaluation Systems, Inc. by calling 413-256-0444 or faxing 413-256-1153. Single copies are free. — *MK*

Making Standards Matter 1999

The American Federation of Teachers is back with its annual report card on state academic standards and accountability. If this sounds familiar, it's because the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation report, *The State of State Standards 2000* (included with this issue of $(SR)^2$), does much the same thing. We, of course, believe that we do it better.

The major finding of the AFT report is that state standards are improving—by their reckoning, 22 states now have decent standards—and that more states are making them matter. Our report differs in two important ways. First, our criteria are more comprehensive and demanding. While the AFT limits their judgments to whether or not standards are clear and specific (and is agnostic regarding content), we also want to know whether the states demand the right body of challenging knowledge and skills. Second, while the AFT focuses on pupil accountability (ending social promotion, exit exams, etc.), we are more interested in adult accountability—identifying low-performing schools, reconstituting failing schools if necessary, etc. (Funny that the teachers' union is less interested in that approach!)

To get a full picture of the standards movement, take a look at both our report and the AFT report. Get *Making Standards Matter 1999* off the web at www.aft.org/edissues/standards99/index.htm. (In a sign of this cyber-age, hard copies are not available.) — *MJP*

The Public View

Doing Comparatively Well: Why the Public Loves Higher Education and Criticizes K-12

Why does the public love higher education and criticize primary and secondary? That's the subtitle of this slim report by John Immerwahr of Public Agenda. Weaving together the findings of numerous studies by Public Agenda and others, it presents a wealth of information on the differing public perceptions of K-12 and higher ed.

That the public does view K-12 and higher ed very differently is clear: according to Immerwahr, higher ed is "teflon-coated" (immune to criticism), while K-12 is "velcro": criticisms thrown at it tend to stick. People see American higher education as a world-class product while giving public K-12 schools low marks for quality. When people say their local schools are doing well, they usually mean compared to schools in other areas, not compared to how they should be doing. The public tends to assign responsibility to the schools for the shortcomings of their students, while college students' failings are seen as their own responsibility.

While the report doesn't really answer the key question posed in the subtitle, the finding that most people think they know a lot about the schools in their communities yet claim to know little about what goes on in institutions of higher education might have something to do with it.

For a copy of *Doing Comparatively Well*, contact the Institute for Educational Leadership at 202-822-8405 (phone), 202-872-4050 (fax), or iel@iel.org, though at $15 for an 18-page report, you might think twice about ordering one. — *MK*

On Thin Ice: How Advocates and Opponents Could Misread the Public's Views on Vouchers and Charter Schools

Recently issued by the respected research organization, Public Agenda, *On Thin Ice* provides an in-depth study of public awareness and opinion on issues of school choice. Its chief finding is that Americans just don't know very much about these things. Sixty-three percent of those surveyed say they know "very little" or "nothing" about vouchers and a whopping 81% say that about charter schools. Even in Cleveland and Milwaukee, sites of the nation's most prominent school choice programs, three-fifths of parents say they know little or nothing about these programs. And about half of parents living in areas rich in charter schools say they know little or nothing about them.

Some other findings offer more solace to choice proponents. Once the idea is explained to them, 57% of the general public and 68% of parents favor the idea of providing a voucher to families to fund all or part of tuition at a private or parochial school. Seventy-nine percent of the public strongly agrees with the statement that "parents should have the right to choose the school they want their child to attend."

On Thin Ice is a must for anyone interested in the condition of the school choice movement in America today–and in the very considerable obstacles confronting those who hope to build public awareness and enthusiasm. You can get a copy from Public Agenda for $10 by calling 212-686-6610 or visiting their website (www.publicagenda.org). — *JRP*

Community Resources

Catalyst: for Cleveland Schools

During the heyday of site-based school reform in Chicago, a little magazine named *Catalyst* functioned as the indispensable chronicler. (Though we haven't seen it lately, we hear it's still a valuable resource.) Now, with the help of several foundations, *Catalyst* has come to Cleveland, to be published bi-monthly and sent to local education movers and shakers. It is *not* meant to track Cleveland's much-reported voucher program but, rather, developments in and around the Cleveland Municipal School District, which is now accountable to Mayor Michael White. How about a *Catalyst* in your community? Meanwhile, if you'd like to see the Cleveland version, contact Urban School News, 1621 Euclid Ave., Suite 1530, Cleveland, OH 44115. Phone 216-623-6320, fax 216-623-6651, surf to www.catalyst-cleveland.org or e-mail editorial@catalyst-cleveland.org. — *CEFjr*

ParenTech – Parenting in a Digital Age

Ameritech and the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory have developed a comprehensive package to help parents help their children learn the fundamentals of technology. *ParenTech – Parenting in a Digital Age* comes complete with an interactive CD-ROM and three 16-page parent guides: "When I Grow Up" (focusing on technology and careers); "Does it Compute?" (focusing on technology and education); and "Fast Forward to the Future" (focusing on technology and society). These guides will assist parents with a shaky grasp on technology, by explaining such items as bits, bytes, microchips, and bandwidth, but they are mainly geared towards making technology familiar and accessible to children, particularly middle-schoolers. The guides suggest a variety of resources for students and plenty of ideas for how parents and their children can approach the vast world of technology together.

"ParenTech" can be investigated at www.parentech.org. Orders for the kit can be placed by calling 1-877-298-7273. ParenTech Kits are available free to families, schools and libraries in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin, but the three parent guides are available to everyone at no charge on the internet site. — *KLA*

Transforming Education Policy: Assessing 10 Years of Progress in the States

In June, the Business Roundtable issued a pair of somewhat self-congratulatory reports on its long-lived "education initiative." This one provides mainly a state-by-state account of progress on education reform over the past ten years, as seen through the eyes of the B.R.T.'s state-specific projects. (The companion report, *No Turning Back*, appraises the B.R.T.'s overall work in this area, and can be found on the organization's website.) In addition to one page per state summarizing what's happened, there's a list of "10 lessons learned" (most of them pretty obvious), several examples of "effective business leadership," and a one-page excerpt from a paper by Dick Elmore about "where reform stands."

Contact Susan Traiman, Director, Education Initiative, The Business Roundtable, 1615 L Street NW, Suite 1100, Washington DC 20036-5610, phone 202-872-1260, fax 202-466-3509 or surf to www.brtable.org. — *CEFjr*

Teachers and Teaching

A Matter of Quality: A Strategy for Assuring the High Caliber of America's Teachers

Lowell Milken, chairman and president of the Milken Family Foundation, has developed a brave and pathbreaking plan for overhauling U.S. teacher preparation and certification that he calls the "Teacher Advancement Program." It has five essential elements: (1) Multiple career paths for teachers; (2) Broad ranges of market-driven compensation for teachers; (3) Multiple entry paths, thus broadening and deepening the teacher pool; (4) Performance-based accountability; and (5) Serious and sustained professional development. In most of its particulars, the Teacher Advancement Program parallels the analysis and recommendations of this Foundation as set forth in *The Teachers We Need and How to Get More of Them* and *Better Teachers, Better Schools*. (Both have previously been sent to $(SR)^2$ readers and remain available on our website.) But even if it weren't similar, the Milken plan deserves attention and plaudits.

It's contained within a very useful 77-page report that you can obtain by contacting the Milken Family Foundation, 1250 Fourth Street, Santa Monica, CA 90401; phone 310-998-2800; fax 310-998-2838. Website: www.mff.org. — *CEFjr*

Urban Education

Improving Community-School Connections: Moving Toward a System of Community Schools

In this new report by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, co-authors Anthony S. Bryk, Paul Hill, and Dorothy Shipps describe how market principles and autonomy can combine to produce high-quality community schools (which they define as schools that serve families who are like-minded with regard to educational philosophy or who simply live in the same neighborhood) in large urban areas.

The authors outline four main characteristics of decentralized, community-linked school systems: school-level autonomy and leadership; new responsibilities for the central office; external support for schools; and accountability. They then illustrate how providing professional development, establishing site-level governance, focusing on achievable outcomes, and stimulating market-style competition, among other changes, have led to higher quality schools in six large cities across the country. They also describe some of the obstacles each community faced and the strategies used to overcome those obstacles.

While none of the cities in the study—including Los Angeles, Chicago, and Seattle—achieved "dramatic, large-scale reform," the authors conclude that the changes made were worthwhile, as school-level responsibility led to improved student achievement.

If you would like a copy of this report or the paper on which it was based *Decentralization in Practice: Toward a System of Schools*, contact the Annie E. Casey Foundation at 701 St. Paul St., Baltimore, MD 21202, or call 410-223-2890. You may also want to check out the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org, or contact them by fax at 410-547-6624. — *LEF*

Catholic Education

CHS 2000: A First Look

The first report of a national survey of Catholic high schools, *CHS 2000* provides a valuable look into the makeup of such schools. It paints a picture of institutions that are increasingly ethnically diverse and that depend more heavily than ever on lay people as teachers and administrators. In 1983, for example, 40% of chief administrators of Catholic high schools were Catholic sisters; fourteen years later, just 23% were. Yet the schools are clinging to their Catholic heritage. 81% of Catholic high school students are themselves Catholic, and 89% of the schools are governed by Catholic religious institutions.
CHS 2000 is introduced by the eminent Catholic school guru, Andrew Greeley, and concludes with commentaries by leading Catholic church figures and by historian Diane Ravitch.

Get a copy for $20 by emailing the National Catholic Education Association at services@ncea.org, by calling 202-337-6232, or by writing to 1077 30th Street, NW, Suite 100, Washington, DC 20007. (ISBN 1-55833-220-0) —*JRP*

Book Review

Educrisis! What To Do When Public Schools Fail

In writing *Educrisis!*, Texas business attorney James T. Evans set out to diagnose the ills of the American education system and to suggest remedies for them. He ranges widely, from the legacy of Al Shanker to the need for better discipline in schools to the pros and (mainly) cons of the Clinton administration education program. The book shines when it pauses in the intersection between politics and education. It's not so strong on issues of teaching and learning. And it's generally stronger on diagnosis than prescription. Evans's main cure for what ails K-12 education in the U.S.—a market-driven voucher system—occupies just six pages (out of 246) and most of that is a recitation of the history of the voucher movement.

Educrisis! was published by the West Eagle Publishing Company, 2103 Commonwealth, Houston, TX 77006. It retails for $16.95 and can be ordered from the publisher's website, http://www.westeagle.net, or by calling 800-991-7191. The ISBN number is 0-9640388-1-1. —*JRP*

Network Notes in this issue were written by Chester E. Finn, Jr., Michael J. Petrilli, Marci Kanstoroom, Kelly Amis, Leo Fuchs and John R. Phillips.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Front Lines

When the presidents of the National Urban League and the Democratic Leadership Council tout school choice (well, some forms of it), merit-based teacher incentives without tenure, and alternative certification, it deserves to make the front lines. In "Urban Education: A Radical Plan," published in *Education Week*, the Urban League's Hugh Price presents a bold four-point strategy for improving urban schools. He calls for strong state leadership, "charterization" of all urban schools, large salary increases for teachers, and a major shift in the roles of superintendents and school boards.

Al From, president of the Democratic Leadership Council, chimes in with the "New Democrats' 10 Key Reforms for Revitalizing American Education." The "New Democrats" advocate alternative certification, merit-based pay, and increased (public school) choice for parents.

Like From and Price, the Education Commission of the States senses that change is in the air. The question is: What kind of change? It seems they can't quite agree among themselves. The recent ECS report, *Governing America's Schools: Changing the Rules*, offers not one but two bold and very different approaches to school governance. You can get the report on the web at www.ecs.org, by contacting the ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427; or by calling 303-299-3692. To illustrate the debate that occurred within the ECS panel that gave birth to this report, we have included two pieces that ran side by side in *Education Week* by Donald R. McAdams and Adam Urbanski, members of the Commission who disagree on which approach is best.

Speaking of governance, who is going to lead our schools if the good principals disappear? In "Lured Away and Forced Out, Principals Leave New York City Schools at Record Pace," Lynette Holloway of the *New York Times* describes a worrisome situation: "New York City," she writes, "is grappling with what experts say is the largest number of leaderless schools in its history."

Our neighbors to the north offer a scathing critique of Kansas's no-confidence vote on evolution in "Scientific Ignorance Wins a Small Victory," by Mark Winston, published by the *Vancouver Sun*. Watch our future mailings for a full report by Dr. Lawrence Lerner on how the states handle evolution. It seems that Kansas is not alone.

LEF

Education Week, December 8, 1999

Urban Education: A Radical Plan

By Hugh B. Price

The saga of public education played out on both sides of the Hudson River this fall. At the IBM Conference Center in Palisades, N.Y., the nation's self-proclaimed education governors and corporate leaders convened to take stock of the education accountability movement and map plans for improving the caliber of public schools.

Directly across the river, the city of Yonkers, N.Y., was roiled by a rancorous school strike. At issue was an instructionally sound proposal by the new superintendent to devote more classroom time per day to fewer core subjects. The local teachers' union cried foul, the school board called their bluff, and the union walkout was on. So the grown-ups in charge of the school district made a sorry mess of a solid idea that principals and teachers probably could have sorted out rather easily in their respective schools.

These days, it seems that tough love is about the only remedy for low achievement that impatient politicians and anxious school administrators can come up with. End social promotion, they proclaim. Send the laggards to summer school and hold them back if they still cannot cut it academically.

These tough-love measures are too timid structurally and off target pedagogically. Ending social promotion alone won't educate all youngsters to their fullest potential. America's most vulnerable children—in low-income urban and rural communities—will bear the brunt of this educationally bankrupt policy because, as things stand now, they'll be left behind in droves.

Successful schools produce successful pupils. Not a smattering of superstars per building, mind you, but the bulk of the student body. After a generation of research and experimentation, examples abound of urban and rural schools that serve low-income and minority pupils quite admirably, with some even outperforming their more affluent suburban counterparts.

Yet try as big-city school boards and administrators might, few if any urban districts can honestly claim that they educate the vast majority of youngsters remotely up to their potential. For the sake of public education and, above all, for the sake of the children, what's urgently needed is truly radical reform that structures public education so that its raison d'être is student success.

According to the longtime urban educator and leader Anthony J. Alvarado, the sole focus of the educational enterprise should be student learning. Everything else, he argues, is "details." "A typical educational system is so top-heavy with details," says Mr. Alvarado, "that learning can suffocate under the tonnage." I advocate a four-point plan for transforming all urban schools into high-performing schools:

(1) Assert no-nonsense state leadership—and responsibility.

Conventional wisdom holds that public education is a local responsibility. But the reality is that the quality of school graduates is a compelling societal concern that justifies aggressive leadership by states and by the federal government.

In the agricultural era, youngsters tended to live where they were reared. But contemporary children often grow up in one town, only to live and work elsewhere. Employers and society at large have the overriding stake in the caliber of education delivered by every school. America's very civility and competitiveness depend on it.

In recent years, states have stepped up to the plate to impose loftier standards and high-stakes tests. Having set the bar, states now bear the primary moral, financial, and legal responsibility for seeing to it that all children have a fair chance to clear it. No longer should poor and minority children be held hostage to communities with low tax bases, weak commitments to quality education, and skinflint taxpayers who oppose providing adequate support for local schools. No longer should children be crippled by school districts saddled with unqualified teachers, insufficient books, and antiquated schools. Having imposed high standards on all children, the states must step in and guarantee high-quality education for every child.

(2) "Charterize" all urban schools.

Urban schools should be liberated from the stifling district bureaucracy and given the latitude to operate the way independent secular schools do. Under the scenario I propose, each school would be overseen by a governing board comprising, for example, local business and community leaders, educators, and alumni who view student success as the school's paramount mission. The boards should be self-perpetuating, so that they are spared the potential turmoil and unpredictability of elections.

Each school would be run by a principal, or headmaster, hired by the board. The principal would serve at the pleasure of the board, subject to due process. The principal in turn would assemble the faculty, whose members would serve at the pleasure of the principal and board, subject again to due process.

The district superintendent would grant each school a revocable contract—or charter—to operate for 10 to 15 years. The school would be accountable for seeing that, say, 75 percent of its students meet the state's real-world proficiency standards. If the school met this standard, it would retain its charter, which could be renewed. If the pass rate fell below this threshold, the school would be placed on a watch list and required to come up with an improvement plan.

If, after a reasonable period, the school failed to boost its performance, then the charter could be revoked without waiting for the term to expire. This means that the governing board and faculty responsible for operating the educational enterprise in that building could be dismissed and replaced with a new team. If need be, the facility itself could be shuttered temporarily or even permanently.

Given the public nature of the school, pupils should be chosen via a mix of self-selection and lottery. This would prevent the creation of what are perceived as "loser" schools that are filled with students who weren't chosen by some other school.

The state would allocate an annual amount to each school based on its enrollment. The allocation formula should be sufficiently generous to guarantee small classes, modern facilities and equipment, sufficient supplies, and abundant high-quality professional development.

The state education agency could negotiate purchase agreements with vendors of textbooks, food, and supplies, so that individual schools get an advantageous price. The states would also assume responsibility for ensuring that individual schools were properly sized and furnished, and for guaranteeing that there was no disparity—in resources, teacher quality, or physical plant—between urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Once each school's allocation was set, the actual utilization would be left entirely to the board and professional staff of each school. In other words, schools should be accountable for how many students they graduated, not for how many gallons of paint they purchased.

(3) Professionalize the teaching profession.

Given the projected shortage of principals and teachers, plus the need to increase teacher quality in urban and rural schools serving low-income children, the compensation offered educators must be improved dramatically in order to create a strong demand for these jobs.

This can be done by increasing salaries to levels comparable with other professions and by offering attractive inducements like generous student-loan write-offs for graduates who enter the profession. Why not offer starting teachers with master's degrees the same initial salaries as young M.B.A.s, attorneys, and engineers? Since most urban and rural districts are strapped financially, the federal and state governments should take the lead in financing the economic incentives needed to attract stronger educators to these districts.

These special incentives should only be available to educators with master's degrees who are certified by the state and who sign up to teach for at least five to 10 years in low-income communities. If they left the profession early, the loan relief would cease.

The critically important quid pro quo for paying educators like real professionals is that they in turn must relinquish those contract-based protections that other professionals do not enjoy. I speak of tenure, seniority, overtime, guaranteed class size, length of class periods, and other provisions that severely impede the ability of principals to run their schools in the best interests of children.

Unions should be allowed to bargain districtwide, indeed statewide, over salaries and fringe benefits. But, subject to appropriate oversight by their boards, principals should make all personnel decisions, such as whom to hire and for how long, as well as the standards for measuring staff performance and the consequences if staff members fall short.

It isn't realistic politically to expect districts to redefine the scope of union agreements this radically. So it's up to governors and state legislators who proudly claim to be the engines of education reform to muster the political courage to override existing agreements and grant individual school boards and principals the discretion they need to run their schools in the best interests of the children.

(4) *The 21st-century superintendent—accreditation, not operation.*

Local school boards and central administrators represent a major source of the "tonnage" that cripples the schools. Rare is the board—elected or appointed—that would be considered an asset to the educational process from the perspective of poor and minority children. Superintendents come and go so quickly that they seldom leave a lasting mark, much less a favorable one. Just below the surface, the central school bureaucracies rule—and stultify.

So what is the solution? The oversight of public schools needs to be professionalized and depoliticized. To cite Anthony Alvarado again, his experience indicates, he says, that urban youngsters can learn at high levels. But, as he cautions, "it takes time, continuity, concentration of focus."

Revolving-door superintendents, ongoing rhetorical battles between mayors and superintendents, mayoral use of fiscal support to hold school boards hostage—all contribute chaos and confusion, instead of continuity and concentration, to the educational enterprise. Children in low-performing schools are the primary victims.

The role of the local superintendent should be converted from operations to accreditation. In other words, the superintendent should be responsible for awarding—and revoking—school charters and reporting to the public on whether the individual schools meet their targets.

If a school does, the superintendent can extend its charter. If it falls short, the superintendent can monitor the school's revitalization plan, revoke the charter if need be, and award it to a new educational team.

Given the state's dominant role in ensuring education quality, local superintendents should be appointed by and ultimately accountable to the state education agency. The superintendent in turn can be assisted by a local board of advisers, chosen by the superintendent and drawn from such sectors as parents, business, organized labor, the religious community, higher education, and community organizations.

This school reform agenda is premised on what we know can work—individual public schools that are given the wherewithal and the room to succeed. It parts company with the failed efforts to reform urban school systems.

When the clock strikes midnight this New Year's Eve, the policymakers, administrators, educators, and unions that share responsibility for public schools had better leave all those excuses—and all that bureaucratic tonnage—in the litter baskets along with the noisemakers.

It will be a new millennium for humankind. If urban public education is to survive in the 21st century, it had better be a new day for urban children.

***Blueprint: Ideas for a New Century*, Autumn 1999**
original published by DLC

New Democrats' 10 key reforms

for revitalizing American education

The challenge for all of our schools is to give students the skills they need to succeed in the New Economy — and as American citizens.

AS THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION RESHAPED AMERICAN SOCIETY AT THE beginning of this century, the philosopher John Dewey wrote: "Our social life has undergone a thorough and radical change. If our education is to have any meaning for life, it must pass through an equally complete transformation." Out of that impetus, the 20th century public school system was born.

Today, at century's end, new forces are again altering American life. Skills and innovation drive growth and prosperity in the New Economy of the Information Age. Changes in our social structure require a new balance between work and family. Global economic competition means that American schools must be transformed again.

But before any profound change can occur, we first need an honest assessment of the status quo.

Today, America is a tale of two public school systems: one that works reasonably well, although it could certainly be better, and one that is by almost any standard a disaster. The one that's enjoying reasonable success is found in affluent and suburban communities, where most students stay in school and continue their education after high school. Despite great pockets of mediocrity, test scores in these schools often compare favorably with our global competitors, and parents, for the most part, are satisfied.

The school system that is failing is found in poor communities. Dropout rates are high, and even the students who graduate often lack the skills to get jobs. Test scores are abysmal — worse than almost any other developed country. Satisfied parents are almost non-existent.

The challenge for both systems is the same: to give students the skills they need to succeed in the New Economy and to fully participate in American life as citizens. But they are very different in degree. The challenge for urban school systems is urgent: they need a complete overhaul. The dramatic turn-around of the Chicago public schools is encouraging, but unfortunately, an anomaly. Millions of youngsters in too many big cities are being denied the quality education they need for an equal opportunity to climb the economic ladder. Suburban school systems must also improve to meet the challenges of the New Economy. But their challenge is to root out mediocrity where it exists.

And while parents, not governments or schools, bear the responsibility for raising children, schools can no longer be norm-free zones. Schools are where children become young adults and learn the habits of American citizens. The curriculum, and the learning environment, must reflect and reinforce the values that bind us as Americans. Schools must become repositories not only of knowledge, but of standards; not only of learning, but of values. They should at once encourage individual achievement, demand discipline, and reinforce community.

by Al From

Al From is the president of the Democratic Leadership Council and Publisher of Blueprint.

Above all, they should be safe.

The tools for lifting the performance of both mediocre and abysmal schools are the same: set high standards, offer parents and students public school choice with real competition among schools, and demand real accountability.

Despite the clear need for change and many commendable efforts at reform, the bottom line is that the kind of systemic overhaul necessary to offer all students a high quality public education is not taking place. That's why the time has come for a whole new look at public education — not just inching ahead with incremental reforms, but a total transformation of how we educate our children.

In this issue of *Blueprint*, we present some of the most innovative thinking on school reform today. Our writers discuss a broad full range of challenges to our educational system, and present compelling possible solutions.

To spark the discussion, *Blueprint* also offers its own list of 10 key ideas for retooling public education for the Information Age. Taken together, these reforms would transform the school system from one designed to serve the adults who run them, not the children who depend on them.

1

PROVIDE CHOICE WITH CHOICES. Our public education system is still too monopolistic. In too many cases, it offers a "one-size-fits-hardly-anyone" model that strangles excellence and innovation. We must offer parents a plethora of choices about what types of public schools their children may attend. Giving them the freedom to make those choices unleashes the power of market competition where it is needed most.

For nearly two decades, blue ribbon commissions have produced volume after volume of recommendations on how to improve public schools. However, the guardians of the status quo — members of the education establishment — have had little incentive to change. We need a public school system where the choice for failing schools is simple: Change or perish.

After ten years and thousands of successful models, it is time to declare that charter schools work. These flexibly organized schools — which receive relief from red tape in exchange for results — have become oases of innovation in a larger desert of monopolistic and cookie-cutter schools. The time has come to bring life to the rest of the desert — by introducing the same forces of choice and competition to every public school in America.

We should rid ourselves of the rigid notion that public schools are defined by who owns and operates them. In the 21st century, a public school should be any school that is of the people (accountable to public authorities for its results), by the people (paid for by the public), and for the people (open to the public and geared toward public purposes). The school system of the future should be a network of accountable schools of all shapes, sizes, and styles with their own decision-making authority — each of which competes against the others for its students.

2

MAKE EVERY SCHOOL A HIGH-PERFORMANCE SCHOOL. Every school should be forced to sign a performance contract that sets clear goals for student achievement. Using all the carrots and sticks we have at our disposal, schools should be impelled to reach these goals. Those that fail would have their licenses revoked and be shut down. In diverse neighborhoods all over America there are examples of schools that work and provide their students with a real education. We should not tolerate anything less.

3

INSTITUTE NATIONAL STANDARDS AND TESTING. If parents are to wisely choose schools for their children, and if schools are to bring real results in the classroom, we need a clear sense of where we are and where we are headed. To understand our starting point in this journey, we must have a comprehensive and cohesive national model for standards and testing. Yet the notion of "national testing" strikes fear and loathing in many political hearts. Too many Republicans are scared off by the word "national;" too many Democrats are worried by the word "testing." Yet national standards and testing do not necessarily mean prescriptions imposed from on-high by the federal government. Instead, America's governors could agree on core standards to be embedded in assessments across state lines. To push them in this direction, the federal government should tie its education dollars to the states' imposing core standards and testing.

4 PUSH SCHOOLS TOWARD A 12/12 SCHEDULE. In an Information Age with 24/7 cash flows and business cycles, our antiquated public school calendar is still based on the pace and seasons of farm life. Schools should examine ways to operate year round, giving children more instruction time and minimizing the learning they lose over the long summer vacation when working parents must scramble for day care. In addition, public schools should no longer observe "school day" hours. Instead, their doors should be open longer. These extra hours should be used to give children more time to learn and to keep them off the streets while their parents are at work. Schools should also be centers for lifelong learning and community activities. Private and nonprofit operators, using school facilities, can help fill this void. Moving from a nine-month calendar and a seven-hour day toward a 12-month/12-hours-a-day schedule is the best way to advance these goals.

5 INSTITUTE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PRESCHOOL FOR ALL CHILDREN. Even as we keep students in school for more of the day and the year, we should expand the amount of time they spend learning. As the Industrial Age picked up steam, it became apparent that a high school education was needed for success. In the Information Age, no one disputes the need for post-secondary learning. We must also recognize the importance of pre-kindergarten instruction. Numerous studies have shown that the early years of a child's development play a disproportionate role in shaping its future cognitive abilities. At a time when parents are trying harder than ever to juggle work and family, an investment in universal pre-kindergarten is both timely and urgent.

6 PAY TEACHERS MORE, BASED ON THE IMPROVEMENT THEY BRING TO THEIR STUDENTS — AND END TEACHER TENURE AS WE KNOW IT. At the core of education is the relationship between teacher and student. Both intuition and research show that good teachers are critical. However, because of low pay and tough working conditions, too few of our brightest young people become teachers. Those talented students who do choose teaching rarely teach in the worst schools — the ones most in need of creativity, energy, and idealism. Worse, teachers — unlike doctors, lawyers, and other professionals — are not usually compensated on the basis of performance.

This should change. Teachers who add value to the classroom by bringing measurable improvements to their students over the course of the school year should receive bonuses commensurate with the increase in their students' achievements. Teachers who perform best should be rewarded most. A performance-reward pay scale would add a material incentive to a teacher's professional and personal dedication to do well by their students. It would also be society's concrete statement of the value of the teacher's work. Special rewards should be offered to teachers who work in the most troubled schools — those where students have the greatest possibility to improve.

When President Clinton, as a candidate in 1992, called for an end to "welfare as we know it," it struck a chord with the American people because welfare represented a system at odds with the basic American values of work, family, and personal responsibility. Today, the practice of teacher tenure — which gives educators a virtual lock on their jobs regardless of how they perform — offends those same values. While we should pay good teachers more, we shouldn't tolerate incompetent teachers at all. America's children deserve at least that. Teachers — like every other employee in the country — should have protection from being fired capriciously or arbitrarily, but they should not be kept in the classroom if they are not up to the job.

7 LET THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST TEACH. In today's public school system, Bill Gates couldn't teach a class in computer science, Maya Angelou couldn't teach an English course, and Stephen Hawking couldn't teach students physics. That's because education schools still have a stranglehold on who is allowed to enter the classroom. We should certify teachers based on their abilities and knowledge, not on the basis of a degree from an education school.

8 **CREATE A NATIONAL TEACHER CORPS.** To tap into the determination and energy of young people who want to serve their country as teachers in the toughest schools, we should create a National Teacher Corps where future teachers are sent to the neediest schools in exchange for help in paying for college.

9 **ENSURE THAT CHARACTER EDUCATION IS PART OF THE CORE CURRICULUM.** Schools must do more than teach the basic three R's; they must also teach young people about responsibility, reliability, and respect. Children are not born fully formed, but need to be taught the difference between right and wrong. Parents have the primary obligation in this regard, yet schools must play their part in forming the character of young Americans.

10 **GIVE NON-COLLEGE BOUND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES A SKILL DEVELOPMENT OPTION.** The New Economy places a high premium on a college education. As a result, the income gap between college graduates and high school graduates is widening. To address this gap, we need new post-high-school institutions that do not sharply separate "training" and "education" as colleges — and that employers view as imparting skills needed for workplace performance at levels as high or higher than four-year colleges. The nation's two-year community colleges are ideally suited to the task.

Horace Mann, the father of America's public schools, called education "the balance wheel of social machinery." Today, for many students that balance is seriously off-kilter. By failing to institute substantial change to our public schools, we doom millions to a bleak future and hinder millions more from reaching their dreams. For Democrats — and for all Americans — the drive to truly improve public education is a test of whether all children are to be afforded the same shot at success that is given to our most privileged children. The future of America will be determined by how well we meet that test.

Education Week, November 24, 1999

Governing Well

Two Approaches From a National Commission For Honing the Enterprise To Support Better Schools

By Donald R. McAdams

Governance matters. Of course it does. Effective public school governance does not guarantee high-performing schools, but without effective governance, good schools are the exception—not the rule.

America's public schools are not the wasteland some critics charge. But in this information age, with school reform a priority in every advanced economy, does anyone think even our best schools are good enough? And what about our worst schools, especially those serving America's poorest children? Need I ask the question?

So, school reform, or renewal, or just continuous improvement, whatever one wishes to call it, is a national priority, and rightly so. Since *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, school reformers—governors, legislators, business leaders, superintendents, principals, teachers and teachers' union leaders, scholars, school board members, and others—have proposed and implemented massive changes. Standards and accountability, restructuring, and the introduction of marketplace forces—charters and public school choice—are improving America's public schools.

School boards would be more effective if they governed more and managed less.

But a great deal more improvement is needed. The existing governance system works well for some children in some districts. But would anyone take the position that governance is unrelated to school performance or that public school governance cannot be improved?

Apparently. The Education Commission of the States, which launched its National Commission on Governing America's Schools in February and throughout the year has solicited input from nearly every conceivable interest group, and even shared its working papers, has been criticized for even putting this issue on the table. This reaction indicates to me that a

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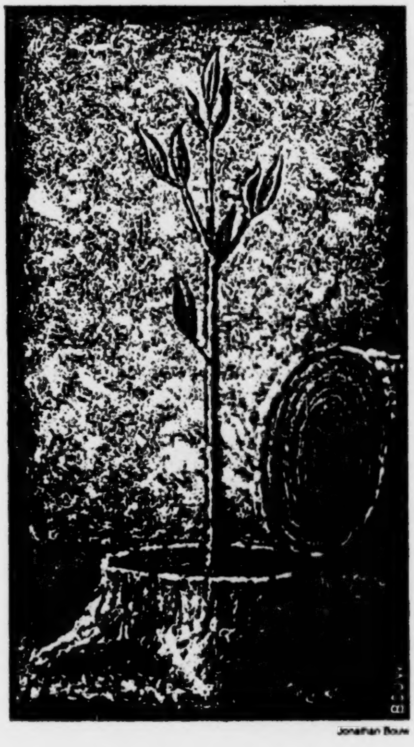

Jonathan Bouw

By Adam Urbanski

It will take a lot to make public schools more effective for all students: greater academic rigor, higher standards of conduct, more parental involvement, meaningful professional development for teachers, stronger incentives for the students themselves, and, of course, more access to health and social services for the many students who are in need of such. To that list, we must add two critical factors that matter a lot: creating more responsive school governance structures; and expanding teachers' capacity to have more professional discretion over their own practice.

What matters most in education is what happens between the student and the teacher. Yet, teachers are least empowered to make decisions about teaching and learning. Saddled with "adminstrivia" and remote-control mandates, teachers all too often have to engage in creative insubordination to do right by their students. Is it any wonder then that so many teachers lament that they love to teach but hate their jobs?

Teachers too often have to engage in creative insubordination to do right by students.

That is why school governance matters too. It can either enhance or impede teaching and learning. There is a growing realization that how we or-

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McAdams: A Board Member's View

Continued from Page 44

public debate on school governance is clearly needed.

This month, the national commission has released its report, "Governing America's Schools: Changing the Rules." *(See Education Week Nov. 10, 1999, and related story in this issue on page 18.)* Let the debate begin.

Everyone has a stake in public education. No doubt, there will be a wide range of responses to the commission's report. Those directly involved in governance—primarily state legislators and school board members—and those most directly affected by it—superintendents, principals, and teachers—will have a lot to say. So will parents, whose voice I hope we hear.

My own view, the view of a school board member, is that the commission's report provides an exciting opportunity for boards to make the two changes that will most improve the performance of the schools they serve: Govern more, and manage less. Let me explain.

The national commission has put forward two approaches to K-12 governance. The first is a system of publicly authorized, publicly funded, and *publicly operated* schools. Sounds like what we have now. But "Governing America's Schools" describes a "fully evolved" version of this system, one stretched to the limits of what it is currently authorized to do. The traditional, one-size-fits-all school system becomes a diversified and high-performance system of schools.

As schools increase their ability to achieve district standards, they gain increasing freedom to accomplish results. This freedom diversifies instructional models within a district and thereby expands choices to parents and students. Individual schools receive funding on a weighted per-pupil basis; write their own budgets; determine staffing patterns and class sizes; hire, evaluate, and fire teachers and other school personnel; determine employee salaries; and purchase services from the district or outside vendors.

The second approach, which I personally prefer, significantly redefines the roles, responsibilities, and interrelationship of states, districts, schools, communities, and public and private organizations. It describes a system of publicly authorized, publicly funded, and *independently operated* schools.

Jonathan Bouw

In this approach, the board of education contracts with independent entities—individual nonprofit or for-profit organizations, cooperatives, sole proprietorships, and the like—to operate a majority of the schools in a district. Specifically, the board authorizes schools; distributes public funds to and oversees schools; educates, recruits, and refers staff members for schools; provides timely, accurate, and reliable information about schools; and renews, cancels, or alters contracts as school operators meet, fail to meet, or exceed contract terms.

Within a system of independently operated schools, there will still be a superintendent and central administration. However, their roles and responsibilities will change significantly. The superintendent and his or her staff will negotiate and manage contracts; evaluate school performance; collect and publish school performance data; interact with the state department of education and other external regulators and funders; and provide or contract for essential management and support infrastructure.

There is a lot more. Implementation of the second approach raises a host of complex legal, management, and transitional issues. Most of these are considered in the commission's report. No one doubts that the devil's in the details, but the commission has thought through implementation issues sufficiently to demonstrate that approach two is practical and doable, and in the end no more complex than approach one or what prevails today.

Both of the approaches put forward by the national commission challenge policymakers to think deeply about what I consider to be the core problem with America's current system of governance. As effective as most school boards are, they would be even more effective if they would govern more and manage less.

Micromanagement by board members and boards is a problem. Just ask a superintendent—off the record, of course. And most board members will acknowledge that they are frequently asked by constituents or vendors to influence a personnel or contract decision, and maybe sometimes have tried to do so.

At the same time, many board members are frustrated by their lack of power to fundamentally change schools. Bold reform policies, because they will have a negative impact somewhere in the system, are rejected. Almost by definition, one-size-fits-all policies cannot be bold. And even when bold reform policies are approved by the board, the bureaucracy has a way of watering them down in the implementation. So underneath the froth of policy churn, little changes.

> Almost by definition, one-size-fits-all policies cannot be bold. And even when bold reform policies are approved, the bureaucracy has a way of watering them down.

The two approaches developed by the national commission make it more difficult for school boards to micromanage. In approach one, school operations are at arm's length from the board of education. In approach two, the board cannot reach into school operations with a 10-foot pole. Board members can tell constituents or vendors or powerful political friends who ask for favors the truth: They have no influence over school operations. In approach two, they also have little influence over district operations because very few school operations remain at the district level.

Governance is another matter. In both approaches, school boards can much more easily transform schools. In approach one, because resources are equitably distributed to schools, because schools have control over budgets and personnel, because district services must compete with external providers, and because students have choice, market forces are at work within the district, and the board can hold schools to ever-higher standards of accountability.

In approach two, the board has even more power to transform schools. Now there is no need to design one-size-fits-all policies or worry about how the district bureaucracy will dilute reform initiatives. School by school, contract by contract, year by year, the board can set standards, provide resources, and demand results.

One of my colleagues on the commission, David Osborne, the coauthor of *Reinventing Government*, makes a powerful point with a metaphor about steering and rowing. One characteristic of high-performance organizations, he points out, is that steering and rowing are separated. Those who steer don't row. Those who row don't steer.

The two approaches to public school governance developed by the national commission make a clear distinction between steering and rowing. As a board member, I am excited about the possibility of having the temptation to row taken away from me and being given the power to really steer.

I hope policymakers, superintendents, principals, teachers, and all of those who are interested in improving America's schools read "Governing America's Schools: Changing the Rules" and join in the debate. What could be better for our democracy or our children than an extended and deep discussion about how best to govern our schools, and then some bold innovation here or there to see if maybe we can do better? ■

Governing Well

Urbanski: The Teacher's Perspective

Continued from Page 44

ganize and govern our schools can be pivotal to our ability to make all the other necessary improvements.

The Education Commission of the States has been looking at promising approaches to improving schools by changing the way they are organized and governed. As part of this three-year effort, the ECS formed the National Commission on Governing America's Schools. During the last year, the commission has been taking a serious look at school governance, considering what components of governance are currently working in some states and districts, thinking about what the future holds for education, and discussing various governance approaches that might merit consideration.

The national commission's members represent a broad spectrum of views about which governance approaches could lead to improved student learning. While individual members might favor one option over the other, we have been able to find much common ground—unity without unanimity.

The commission agrees that:

- Our public system of education should be strengthened, not undermined or discarded.
- Improved student achievement should be the primary focus of an accountability system.
- More operating decisions affecting students should be made at the school level.
- Parents should have more choice about which public schools their children attend.
- Good information on student, teacher, and school performance should be available for parents and the community.

The commission's final report, "Governing America's Schools: Changing the Rules," puts forth two governance options to consider. These two approaches are based on available research about the relationship between governance systems and education results; the experiences of states, districts, and schools in changing their governance systems; and the various perspectives of commission members on this issue.

The two approaches are:

(1) A system of publicly authorized, publicly funded, and publicly operated schools, based on research, models of high-performing school governance systems in other countries, and the more promising trends within our current system of public education.

(2) A system of publicly authorized, publicly funded, but independently operated schools, based on some of the more promising alternatives to the current system of public education governance.

I favor option one. This approach preserves public education and democratic control over our schools. It builds on the strengths of the existing system by increasing its capacity for adaptability, flexibility, and accountability. Some of the ideas and strategies embodied in this approach have been successfully implemented in states, districts, and schools across the country: school-based decisionmaking, performance-based accountability, public school choice, and standards-based teaching and learning.

Yet, strategies such as these are the exception, not the rule. This newly crafted governance option—of publicly authorized, publicly funded, and publicly operated schools—would allow and enable schools and communities to bypass the bureaucratic maze and provide greater authority at the school level. In a less centralized system such as this, the faculty, staff, and parents in each community and at each school would have greater authority and capacity to tailor the teaching and learning methods to meet high standards as well as the unique needs of their students.

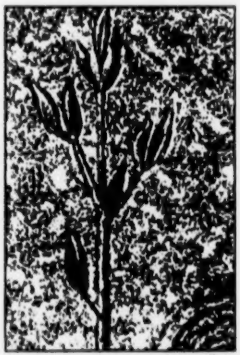
Fixing governance, though, must be accompanied by the development of new models of labor-management relations. Without it, it is tantamount to one hand clapping. School authorities and teachers must find ways to use the collective bargaining process to negotiate provisions that increase the prospects for student success.

They can do so by collaborating on improving low-performing schools, further expanding the scope of collective bargaining to include instructional and professional issues, investing in the knowledge and skills of teachers, and shifting greater flexibility and authority to the individual schools. The "thin contract" idea that American Federation of Teachers President Sandra Feldman recently proposed is a good example of such a promising direction. That proposal would give school-level professionals the authority and flexibility to adopt programs, strategies, and schedules that work best for their students. Such a model is very much in step with decentralizing school governance—strengthening collaboration and local control.

As the National Commission on Governing America's Schools concludes its work, the discussion about school governance in states and districts is just beginning. The ECS is already working with interested states and districts where leaders are rethinking their systems of governance to help improve student performance. But, as states and districts move forward, they must test these proposals for changes in governance against a set of criteria that not only asks whether the reform measures have a chance for increasing school achievement and school choice, but also whether the options will be likely to serve the most fundamental purposes of public education: promoting a shared set of American values and a common understanding of our history and traditions.

We are a diverse nation, one that is threatened by a growing disparity between the rich and the poor, blacks and whites, and those with access to technology and those who are isolated from it. Any governance change must ameliorate these inequities as well as address academic excellence.

Excellence without equity is not excellence, it is privilege. Our goal should not be to help some to opt out; rather, it must be to help all children gain access to good schools and a good education. ■



Jonathan Bouw

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The New York Times, **September 20, 1999**

Lured Away and Forced Out, Principals Leave New York City Schools at Record Pace

By LYNETTE HOLLOWAY

New York City principals are leaving their posts in record numbers, propelled by a festering four-year contract battle with the city, higher salaries in the suburbs and a campaign by the Schools Chancellor to rid the system of what he considers failing leaders.

While other large cities across the country are also facing a shortage of principals, New York City is grappling with what experts say is the largest number of leaderless schools in its history. While some principals were dismissed in a drive to weed out poor performers, some of the system's most highly regarded leaders have left for other reasons.

The exodus comes at a time when the very top teachers' salaries will soon surpass those of most principals, when schoolchildren face the toughest promotional standards in decades and when the system has been thrown into confusion by flawed reading-test scores and the mistaken assignment of thousands of students to summer school.

"There are more vacancies for principals and a greater dearth of qualified candidates than I've seen in the last 40 years," said Seymour Fliegel, a senior fellow at the Center for Educational Innovation, a New York City research institute. "It's only going to get worse. If they care about the children, the city and the union will settle this right now."

When the school year began on Sept. 9, about 16 percent, or 195 of the city's 1,200 schools, opened without permanent principals, Board of Education officials said.

Neither the New York City Board of Education nor the principals' union, the Council of Supervisors and Administrators, could provide exact figures on how many principals have left the system for the suburbs. But union leaders, who have been negotiating for pay increases, estimated that about half the vacancies were created when principals were lured away for higher pay.

School districts in Westchester County, New Jersey and Long Island pay principals up to $30,000 more than the city, which has a minimum average salary of about $70,000. New York City principals have not received a raise since October 1995 and have been without a contract since February 1996, widening the gap between what the city and the suburbs pay. When a new salary scale for teachers goes into effect in December, the most experienced teachers working in the new Chancellor's district of 40 failing elementary and middle schools will make $80,000 — more than many principals.

City leaders, however, paint the exodus in positive colors, saying it reflects the efforts to rid the system of incompetent principals. Dr. Crew and Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani have been reluctant to sign an agreement with the principals' union, saying they believe the tenure system protects inept school leaders. Under the current system, which is written into state law, principals cannot be transferred without union permission and cannot be demoted or dismissed without what can become long disciplinary hearings.

Fewer takers for jobs leading troubled urban schools.

The city has offered the principals' union a raise of 33 percent and three-year renewable contracts if principals give up tenure and work a longer year. The union represents about 4,500 principals, assistant principals and other administrators.

But the city is in a bind. While trying to weed out underperforming principals by repealing the tenure law, it is losing principals like Arnold M. Goldstein, who left in June for an affluent school district in Long Island.

For five years, he was principal of one of the city's prized schools: Benjamin N. Cardozo High in Bayside, Queens, where almost all graduating seniors go on to four-year colleges. In 1998, Newsweek magazine listed Cardozo as one of the top 100 schools in the country.

Mr. Goldstein said that he was reluctant to leave, but that the decision was an economic one. As principal of Jericho High School in Jericho, N.Y., he makes about 50 percent more than the $80,000 he made in New York City after 25 years of service. Cardozo is more than six times larger than Jericho High, which has about 700 students.

"It was a difficult decision," said Mr. Goldstein, who grew up attending New York City public schools and who landed his first teaching job in the system. "It took me several weeks to decide to go for it. It was an opportunity to work in a small school, and the salary certainly was a factor. I had to take it."

Henry L. Grishman, the Superintendent of Jericho's public schools, was unabashed in his recruitment of Mr. Goldstein in March. The Superintendent said he had waited until he could offer Mr. Goldstein a position at a high-achieving school.

"There is an awareness in the suburbs that principals are working in the city without a contract and are not well paid or highly appreciated," Mr. Grishman said. "That obviously makes it easy for me to recruit a top high school principal from New York City."

Saul Yanofsky, the Superintendent of the White Plains School District, said that New York City has some of the best trained public school educators in the country. This year, he hired two assistant principals from Community School District 2 in Manhattan as principals.

Last year, Melvin B. Katz left as principal of Middle School 141 in Riverdale, the Bronx, to lead Glenfield

Middle School in Montclair, N.J. He now makes $92,500, about $12,000 more than he made in New York City after 33 years.

"I left because of the money and low morale," Mr. Katz said. "There was less respect and increased responsibility, which I could have dealt with. I think you will find that true of almost all my colleagues who have left."

Not only are principals leaving New York City, but, in addition, few qualified teachers are willing to step up to the plate because it would mean a pay cut for a far more stressful job. Filling the 195 vacancies will not be easy. It involves committees comprising parents, teachers and union representatives, and can be a drawn-out process tainted by petty politics.

New York, whose school system was once the most prestigious in the country, is not alone. From Washington to Philadelphia to Los Angeles, school systems report a shortage of principals, said Vincent L. Ferrandino, the executive director of the 30,000-member National Association of Elementary School Principals, a nonprofit organization based in Alexandria, Va.

A number of factors have come together to make leading a school far less attractive than in the past. These include higher salaries for teachers, increased accountability, longer hours, a longer year and high-stakes testing, where one flagging performance by a school's students can cost a principal a job. While most cities used to provide principals with tenure, many, like Chicago, repealed the laws in the face of failing schools. Now, they offer renewable contracts based on performance.

The principal shortage is so pronounced that New York's crown jewel, Stuyvesant High School, which admits students based on a stiff entrance exam, received only about two dozen applications last year while searching for a new principal. That number was down about 75 percent from previous searches, including five years ago when Jinx Cozzi-Perullo was hired, Mr. Fliegel said. Ms. Cozzi-Perullo retired and was replaced this fall by Stanley Teitel.

"Superintendents all over the city are telling me they cannot get people who want to work as principals," Mr. Fliegel said. "Stuyvesant is the city's flagship school. Hundreds of people should want to work there."

Peter M. Comeau, a co-director of the Principals' Leadership Institute at Teachers College, Columbia University, surveyed about two dozen principals and about a half dozen superintendents last year when the fledgling group drew a weak response from people interested in the training.

"The lack of a contract was key," Mr. Comeau said. "They didn't talk so much about the money as much as they did about the loss of respect that seems to accompany the negotiations."

Over the years, principals became demonized as political hirelings. Some were handpicked by members of the city's 32 community school boards as favors to friends or relatives. But the 1996 school governance law removed the power to hire and fire principals from school boards and turned it over to district superintendents.

The aim was to stamp out patronage and corruption, and Dr. Crew was given broad new powers to remove underperforming principals, chiefly on charges of "persistent educational failure." When he failed to remove principals immediately, he was roundly criticized. Dr. Crew contended that the job protections of tenure forced him to place the bad principals elsewhere in the system.

But in June, Dr. Crew announced the dismissal of 58 principals at failing schools in the largest shake-up in the history of the school system. A majority had planned to retire anyway, and critics asserted that Dr Crew included them in the tally — which included even principals with distinguished careers — to stanch criticism that he was not doing enough to remove failing principals.

Of the rest who were removed, some principals reverted to their previous job as assistant principal or teacher. About a dozen went to work elsewhere in the system, sometimes doing paperwork or supervising administrative projects at district offices, or at the Board of Education headquarters in downtown Brooklyn, said Jill Levy, executive director of the Council of Supervisors.

The reassignments underscore the city's need to do away with tenure, said Robert R. Kiley, president of the New York City Partnership and Chamber of Commerce, one of the city's largest business groups.

"Principal tenure is a bizarre self-defeating system for the very people who shouldn't need it," said Mr. Kiley, who helped to pass the school governance law. "A person's job should rise and fall based on the performance of a school. The governance law provided some reform, but it's still an uphill battle."

Some principals agree. Last year, a dissident group of about 200 high school principals announced that it wanted to break away from the Council of Supervisors and give up tenure protection. Members said they wanted to exchange tenure for higher pay and greater authority over hiring and firing.

The group never mobilized to secure collective bargaining power. But Jesse Lazarus, principal of Transit Tech High School in East New York, Brooklyn, and president-elect of the organization, said he still supports modifications to the tenure law if the new process is divorced from internal and city politics.

The Vancouver Sun, **December 9, 1999**

Scientific Ignorance Wins a Small Victory

Mark Winston

It hasn't gotten around to burning at the stake, yet. In fact, the penalty for teaching forbidden subjects remains vague.

The issue has, however, generated bumper stickers, a sure sign that it's a hot button item. My favorite so far: "Kansas, where evolution has been outlawed and the monkeys are in charge."

Elimination of evolutionary biology from the classroom is the centrepiece of new law in the state of Kansas that dictates science curriculum. It is not, however, the only banned subject. A few other cornerstones of human intellectual achievement also won't be allowed in the classroom, like the big bang theory, the concept of time in the earth's geological history and radioactive decay.

What's left is seductively simple creationism, with its easy-to-grasp tenets. God created the Earth and the life on it 10,000 years ago, it took six days, end of story. The only necessary textbook is the Bible, which saves school districts a considerable sum of money, since there are many groups ready to provide books free of charge.

The ban on teaching evolution and related celestial subjects is unlikely to stick. Evolution bashers have tried in many other states, and failed. A focused campaign in Kansas to restore sanity to the education system is under way and knowledge will likely once again be disseminated to students soon.

What is most astounding in this oft-repeated creation vs. evolution script is how many people still don't believe in evolution. Polls consistently indicate close to half of us believe that a strict biblical view of creation is correct, and most of the rest believe that God at least has directed evolution towards its inevitable pinnacle, mankind.

This is truly remarkable given the overwhelming scientific evidence supporting evolution, consistent and vocal defence for evolutionary theory from teachers and scientists, and even unequivocal support for the theory of evolution from priests, ministers and rabbis representing the large majority of mainstream religious groups in North America.

What is it about evolution and related topics that repel the conscious mind of the public who otherwise are comfortable with scientific knowledge? The precepts of evolutionary theory are elegant in their simplicity. Life changes over time, or evolves, and those changes are dictated by natural selection, so that individuals with characteristics best suited to their environment will survive and produce more offspring.

These concepts are as close to fact as electricity making our lights go on and the Earth revolving around the sun, yet some part of our human brain continues to deny the reality of evolution. It's not the rational, how-to part of our psyche that's having the problem.

Today, modern genetics and ecology have provided us with enough of the nuts and bolts of evolutionary mechanisms that our earlier lack of knowledge concerning how organisms evolve and change is no longer a barrier to belief.

No, what confuses the human mind is the absence of "why" in evolutionary theory. Evolution is directionally neutral and there is no guiding point of the compass leading evolution forward. Rather, it is by random chance that any species is here, including ours, and it is unlikely that we or any other species will remain extant forever.

It is this pointlessness that we cannot grasp and the lack of meaning in evolution that confuses the human mind. If evolution has no point, then we are not important, and perhaps there is no fundamental rationale for morals and ethics, and no high purpose for human endeavours.

Except that evolutionary theory is neutral on this subject and makes no claims about the human experience. Indeed, all science is objectively impartial and at its best only describes the properties of the universe around us. Science tells us that electrons rotate around the nucleus of an atom, and DNA divides within the nucleus of a cell, but finding meaning in these patterns is beyond the objective boundaries of scientific observation.

Nevertheless, it should tell us something about our human nature that we continue to insist on imposing meaning on these patterns and rebel at unfiltered science that descends into our classrooms without any judgement about underlying purpose. Perhaps we biology professors who teach evolution have been mistaken in taking such a purely objective approach to a subject that evokes a non-rational, visceral response in our students and their parents.

It's not that we should be teaching religious creationism in the schools or qualifying evolutionary theory with the "maybe" and "it's not proven" demands of creationists. Rather, we need to add an accompanying dimension to how we teach evolution, and all science, that asks students to ponder the meaning of their existence in the light of scientific fact.

There have been two great revolutions in human thinking. The first, occurring many thousands of years ago, was the concept of one or more divine beings, as represented by religion in all its diverse forms. The second, and more recent, has been the growth of rational explanations through scientific knowledge for virtually every aspect of our existence.

These two strands represent two distinct branches of the human psyche that come into tangible conflict when evolution and religion meet in the classroom.

We need to better balance our religious and scientific beliefs, because the capacity to believe in both God and the scientific method are integral and companion parts of our human nature. A fundamental aspect of what makes us human is our drive to impose purpose, and science ultimately will fail to influence the human agenda if it fails to address the meaning of our presence.

Banning the teaching of evolution is driven by this paradox, that we as humans are compelled to pursue scientific, objective knowledge while simultaneously being motivated to find some meaning behind our existence. Our solution to this dilemma will not lie in denying evolutionary theory, nor will it be found in dismissing the divine.

Rather, we need to move forward toward a third revolution in human development, a merging of our belief in purpose and our acceptance of science as a neutral descriptor of nature. We need to discover another fundamental truth, that there is no conflict between belief in divinity and scientific knowledge.

Our challenge in schooling our children is to merge the how of science and the why of religion and ethics, and only then will human thought move from banning the knowable because it can't explain the unfathomable.

Mark Winston is a professor of biological sciences at Simon Fraser University and a regular contributor to Insight.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Federal Issues

For the first time in decades, the Republicans control both the House and Senate at the same time that the mammoth Elementary and Secondary Education Act is up for reauthorization. This would seem to be the perfect time for the GOP to stake out its own distinctive education policies and fire people up for some much-needed changes in the way Uncle Sam goes about his business in this domain. So far, however, the majority party seems to be settling for relatively minor nips and tucks in existing programs. In "The GOP Congress Fails Again," published in the *Weekly Standard* in November, Checker Finn deplores some opportunities lost (in the House) and some that lie ahead (in the Senate).

Meanwhile, President Clinton has found plenty of ways to strengthen his, and the Democrats', hold on education at the national level. One such mechanism is to fill an unprecedented number of key Education Department posts with friends and party loyalists. While patronage is not new to the White House, Mr. Clinton has taken it to a new level, at least in education. Read about it in "Department a Haven for Clinton Loyalists," by Judy Pasternak of the *Los Angeles Times*.

Lastly, Anjetta McQueen of the Associated Press casts doubt on the practicality of the Administration's (and, now, the Congress's) initiative to hire hordes of new teachers, asking, for instance, where all the new classrooms will come from. Her AP piece displays some of the knotty details that make this crowd-pleasing idea such a challenge in the real world.

KLA

The Weekly Standard, November 29, 1999

The GOP Congress Fails Again

Congressional Republicans capitulate to some really bad education ideas.

BY CHESTER E. FINN JR.

THE *NEW YORK TIMES*'s lead education reporter seemed surprised by his own discovery: Hiring more teachers for U.S. schools is harder than it sounds. In New York City this year, seven-eighths of those teachers hired with Washington's help have been doubled up in classrooms with other teachers. There was nowhere else to put them (and the city had to spend part of its windfall to show them how to team-teach). Moreover, just half are certified in their subjects. In tiny Raymondville, Missouri, on the other hand, there's plenty of classroom space but the federal aid formula yielded barely $7,000 for the whole school system, enough to hire just one part-time classroom aide.

School officials in both communities welcomed the extra cash, of course, but as their experience showed the *Times* reporter, "It takes more than money to put an effective teacher in front of a classroom."

That's what makes Congress's capitulation to the White House on the fractious class-size-reduction program so pathetic. Just as Republicans are starting to wrap their minds around a coherent strategy for overhauling federal education aid, Clinton roars back with a politically shrewd, Great Society program that wastes money, ignores most of the research, shoves states and communities around, focuses on what goes into schools rather than what comes out, creates manifold new problems, and fails to accomplish anything important for children. Yet for the second year in a row, Congress caves. Once is a mistake. Twice is fecklessness.

That pretty much describes the first half of the 106th Congress when it comes to education. Lyndon Johnson might as well still be in charge. Big, categorical, Washington-knows-best programs remain the order of the day. Education Department enforcers ride high. State reform schemes and local priorities are undermined. And Clinton runs political circles around Capitol Hill. No wonder surveys find voters more inclined to trust Democrats with the education issue.

Though the new teachers program got most of the ink, the year's premier blunder was the House's renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This was the first time a Republican majority has ever had a chance to recast the centerpiece of Washington's role in K-12 schooling, and, mostly, they blew it.

Take the so-called Student Results Act, which Education Committee chairman Bill Goodling described as "the largest component of [the GOP] strategy this Congress to improve elementary and secondary education." It doesn't even deal with the whole of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, mainly just the $8 billion Title I program for disadvantaged youngsters. Here, the House embraced the core Clinton strategy: Since Title I, by common consent, hasn't worked these past 35 years, tighten the regulatory screws. And it rejected the only serious idea for overhauling the program: Strap federal money to the backs of low-income youngsters and let them take it to the schools of their choice. Dubbed "portability," this would have transformed the federal role from one of subsidizing school bureaucracies to one of directly aiding needy children. Instead of ever weightier regulation, it would have introduced accountability via the marketplace.

Yet portability was voted down in committee, and two separate versions were clobbered on the floor. Although the Student Results Act purports to allow children trapped in low-performing schools to exit to other (public) schools, their federal aid dollars stay in the failing schools.

One beam of light, however, shone through the gloom. A few hours after wimping out on the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the House narrowly passed the "Straight A's" bill, which treats participating states and cities like giant charter schools, offering them sweeping freedom to spend federal dollars as they see fit in exchange for palpable gains in pupil achievement. Should this measure make it through the Senate and survive a White House veto threat, it would herald a new chapter in U.S. education policy.

Yet Straight A's was bobtailed during the first stage of its legislative journey, turned into a pilot program for no more than 10 states, and shackled by a "hold harmless" provision that assures districts as much money as they would get from the Title I program absent Straight A's. These concessions bought only a couple of Democratic votes and no White House support. They were made to keep skittish Republicans on board. The prospect of actually altering the ground rules of federal education policy gives palpitations to GOP "moderates."

To be fair, Republicans were not exactly overwhelmed by home-state clamor for change. While the Education Leaders Council, a group of dissident education officials such as Arizona's Lisa Graham Keegan, pushed hard for Straight A's, and individual governors wrote in support of it, the Council of Chief State School Officers was bitterly opposed. And the National Governors' Association, reportedly deferring to North Carolina's Jim Hunt, said it could only support Straight A's if Title I were excluded. The problem is that program accounts for two-thirds of the money. No sane state will take the sizable risk of Straight A's—committing to stronger achievement for poor and minority kids—if the National Governors' Association prevails. Straight A's without Title I is Thanksgiving without the turkey.

Why do state and local officials cling to old-line categorical programs rather than welcome the freedom to make decisions for themselves? Some say they don't trust Washington to maintain funding for block grants and other nebulous categories that lack specific constituencies. The deeper explanation is that they've succumbed to the Stockholm Syndrome, the peculiar bond that develops between captor and captive, between terrorist and hostage. They've been locked up for so long by the public school establishment that they've begun to see their jailers' interests as their own.

Congressional Republicans display a touch of the Stockholm Syndrome, too. Their longtime captors—Democrats in general, the Clinton administration in particular, the teachers' unions, and other elements of what Bill Bennett calls "the education blob"—have them brainwashed and cowering. Republicans have repeatedly pumped extra billions into dubious Education Department programs—billions more than even the White House has sought. Another symptom was the House's decision to keep the Women's Educational Equity Act.

This tiny program purports to combat school-based discrimination against girls. In reality, it funds left-wing groups to continue harping on alleged injustices that have been resoundingly disproved by such scholars as Diane Ravitch and Judith Kleinfeld. During the renewal process for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the education committee proposed to scrap this bit of federally funded agitprop. But a predictable uproar ensued, and when it was hinted that Republicans were being unkind to girls and women, the leadership crumpled. The House reversed its committee. The Women's Educational Equity Act endures. The terrorists remain in control.

Prior to their autumn collapse, House Republicans were showing signs of emerging from captivity. After all, they advanced some good ideas. Straight A's still represents a major policy innovation that is miles ahead of the slash-and-burn approach of 1995 and fully compatible with the muscular-yet-flexible stance urged by George W. Bush in his recent trio of education speeches. Likewise, portability has the potential to take the principle of school choice, which enjoys ever wider public support, and apply it to federal K-12 programs without losing their focus on needy kids. Both ideas promote accountability combined with freedom, the double-barrelled school reform strategy that is making such promising headway in states and communities. Taken together, they contain a coherent alternative to 35 years of failed big government programs, one that would resonate with voters while triggering needed change in their children's schools. They are the exact opposite of things like Clinton's class-size-reduction scheme, the Women's Educational Equity Act, and the hyper-regulatory approach to Title I.

But the House's weakened version of Straight A's (and the even weaker "Ed-Flex" measure a few months earlier) was as far as the 106th Congress could get in escaping from its captors. Next year is the Senate's turn. The early signals are not encouraging. Important reforms—Straight A's, portability, and more—can be found in bills written by Slade Gorton, Judd Gregg, Bill Frist, and Tim Hutchinson, as well as Joe Lieberman across the aisle.

But Education Committee chairman Jim Jeffords, working behind closed doors with ranking Democrat Ted Kennedy, has drafted a Stockholm-style measure that makes the House look daring. It basically leaves the Elementary and Secondary Education Act intact and adds a whopping new early-childhood education program. If the Senate heads down that road, serious reformers might prefer legislative gridlock until a real education president can take the wheel. But the GOP will have squandered one of its best opportunities to repair American education and to retain control of Congress. ◆

Los Angeles Times, October 3, 1999

Department a Haven for Clinton Loyalists

By: JUDY PASTERNAK
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON-When Carol Moseley-Braun lost her U.S. Senate seat last fall, she didn't worry long about her next paycheck.

Just before her term expired, the Illinois Democrat signed on as a consultant to the Department of Education at $453.84 per day.

Her contract called for her to provide expertise on "school construction issues," although the agency has no money to build classrooms.

When Carol H. Rasco wanted out of her influential post as White House domestic policy chief, she also found a lucrative berth at Education. Rasco, who is paid $125,900 annually, runs a skeletal reading program that Congress has refused to fund.

Moseley-Braun and Rasco have plenty of well-connected company: The Clinton administration, which has made improving schools a top priority, is using the government's lead education agency to provide employment for assorted Democratic loyalists.

Although the hiring of political appointees and consultants outside normal Civil Service channels is nothing new in Washington, the patronage system is more pervasive at Education than at any other federal agency.

The smallest Cabinet department, with 4,800 employees, Education has 167 appointees-one to every 29 workers, according to the Office of Personnel Management. The average ratio for Cabinet departments is one to 807.

Previous administrations have considered the Education Department, then an obscure agency that came under little scrutiny, an ideal holding spot for political appointees. The Clinton administration wanted to change all that and, in fact, managed to limit the numbers of appointees during its first term. But since Clinton's reelection in 1996, it has resumed the tradition of packing the department with loyal supporters, campaign workers and their relatives.

At the same time, Education has grown in importance. The department's mission of improving America's schools has moved to the top of the national agenda. Clinton frequently calls it a pressing domestic priority, and polls show that voters agree.

Just four years after congressional Republicans tried to kill the department, lawmakers now are committing more money to Education than ever before, increasing its discretionary funding since 1996 by 46%, from $23 billion to $33.5 billion. And, for the first time since the agency's inception in 1979, front-runners for both the Democratic and GOP presidential nominations are promising to expand it.

The Education Department is charged with addressing particular needs and problems in the nation's schools, such as improving student performance, curbing violence and ensuring equal opportunities for poor, disadvantaged students. Local school districts, which receive federal grants, administer the programs.

Education Secretary Richard W. Riley says that the department's new place on center stage is precisely why so many appointees are needed. To launch new initiatives, he said, his hires have "to forge political connections" with governors and school superintendents.

"I'm very pleased with the people we have attracted here," Riley said. Report Finds Flaws in Patronage System

But, in the past, a high level of political patronage at the agency has not corresponded with effectiveness. In the 1980s and '90s, the department was criticized repeatedly by the General Accounting Office for management problems and lackluster results.

A work force too dependent on appointees can hamper performance because the appointees seldom stay for even one full presidential term, experts say. At Education, it is also common for them to be diverted-for as much as a year at a time-for White House projects unrelated to improving schools. These include the president's commission on race and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's historic-preservation effort.

The agency's political ranks are a curious mix: a former Stanford University education dean, a onetime suburban New York school superintendent, the president's goddaughter, the Transportation secretary's sister-in-law and myriad Clinton-Gore campaign veterans. The children of a former Democratic governor, a former Democratic senator and a former Clinton Housing secretary have passed through the department's payroll.

In addition, two men are working at Education despite having been scarred by professional scandal elsewhere. One appointee previously was named in connection with a cover-up of Treasury bond fraud. Another pleaded guilty to theft and possession of forged checks during a campaign.

"Here is a department that is promoting standards and excellence [for schools] but appears to have less of a commitment to high standards for itself," said Paul C. Light, director of the Brookings Center for Public Service and an expert on the federal government.

White House spokesman Barry Toiv said the Clinton administration turned a neglected department into an instrument for helping states and communities improve education. "While Republicans have tried to weaken and even kill the department, the president has improved it with strong leadership and adequate resources so that it can carry out his ambitious agenda for improving our schools and expanding access to higher education," Toiv said.

In 1993, the incoming Clinton administration was cautioned in a GAO report that the tradition of so many appointees at Education created "management challenges." Increases Began in Reagan Years

Education has accommodated progressively larger numbers of appointees since President Carter created the agency. According to reports published by Congress, about 75 appointees served under Jimmy Carter in 1980 and about 166 under George Bush in 1992.

The increase began when Ronald Reagan's administration, which wanted to abolish the agency, used Education as a place to stash campaign supporters and appointees who had fallen out of favor at other departments.

Midway through Clinton's first term, Education's inspector general began warning that the department lacked employees with critical computer and financial skills and that it needed people with expertise to oversee outside contractors.

This shortage has continued while increasing numbers of appointees have been added, said Dianne van Riper, who retired in January as the department's assistant inspector general for investigations.

"When you decide to spend a dollar on hiring one kind of employee and not on another, you're making a decision," Van Riper said.

In addition to its growing roster of political appointees, Education has 63 advisory board members-by far the most in the Cabinet, and retains 38 consultants, the second-highest proportion.

One of the consultants, Moseley-Braun, was "concerned, as anyone would be," when she faced the loss of her Senate salary of $136,673 after election defeat last November, said a former aide, Steven Collens.

She told her Senate staff that she had been promised nomination as ambassador to New Zealand, a process that she knew could take months. She went to Riley.

The secretary offered her a contract to "develop outreach plans and initiatives to convey information on the need for school reconstruction to communities, officials of state and local government, parents, business leaders and school administrators."

Before entering politics-where she became one of Clinton's most dependable votes in the Senate-Moseley-Braun had been an assistant U.S. attorney in Chicago. Her Senate defeat, after one term, followed questions about her personal and campaign finances and her meeting with a discredited Nigerian dictator.

Despite Moseley-Braun's lack of education experience, Riley called her "a very logical choice." As a senator, she promoted federal financing for school buildings. Twice, she led efforts to fund school construction, but Congress rejected the idea on grounds that it was a local and state responsibility.

Moseley-Braun's contract called for intermittent employment, allowing her time to pursue other opportunities, such as speechmaking. From mid-January through mid-July, she received $23,145.84 from the department.

Rasco informed Clinton in 1995 that she wanted out of the hectic environment at the White House. The solution: a job at Education.

A former middle school counselor and longtime Clinton aide from Arkansas, Rasco had been a controversial choice among the president's advisors as policy chief. Education provided her a similar six-figure salary and a position directing America Reads, a program she helped design while at the White House. But without funding from Congress, Rasco was left to give speeches around the country urging parents to read to their children and calling on colleges to get work-study students to tutor at local schools, even though no money was available to train tutors.

Perhaps the ultimate political plum at Education is held by former Philadelphia Mayor W. Wilson Goode: a $105,269-a-year post coordinating regional representatives whose public relations jobs are heavy on ceremony and light on substance. Goode served as the mayor of Philadelphia from 1984 to 1992 and as a Clinton fund-raiser in the '92 campaign.

"It is somewhat puzzling," said John Puckett, a University of Pennsylvania education professor who monitors Philadelphia schools. "I honestly don't know what qualifications Wilson Goode would bring."

As mayor, Goode had no direct oversight over schools. His authority was limited to appointing some school board members from a pool of nominees. In an interview, Goode said that he has nurtured "a passion for education for 35 years. My wife and I were active in our children's public schools." He also began teaching a political science course at Eastern University before joining Education in 1993.

Goode serves as Riley's Philadelphia representative and also oversees the work of his counterparts and their assistants in nine other regions. The primary responsibility of these officials is to represent Riley at local school events and meetings.

Among the 16 appointees, whose combined salaries exceed $1.3 million a year, are many Democratic activists: two former teachers' union officials, the wife of a Texas state senator, a former mayor of Berkeley, a longtime friend of Riley's who worked at IBM, a former Senate staff member for Vice President Al Gore and a onetime Vermont House speaker who campaigned for Clinton there.

When George Bush was president, department officials contemplated eliminating the regional representatives. But a former Bush appointee said no one could summon the political will to do it.

Unlike regular government employees, appointees are not required to take Civil Service exams or compete for posted vacancies.

The Clinton administration has had its share of problem appointees. Among them: transferred White House aide Linda R. Tripp and presidential paramour Monica S. Lewinsky, who both got political jobs in the Pentagon's public affairs office. Another: John Huang, who was awarded a political job at Commerce in 1994 through the influence of loyal Clinton donors. Two years later, Huang emerged as a central figure in the campaign-finance scandal.

The Huang saga led Secretary Bill Daley to vow to slash political positions when he took over at Commerce in 1997. "There is a place for politics in public life, but there is no place for politics in any of the decisions that are made at the Commerce Department," Daley said at his confirmation hearing.

Appointee ranks at Commerce are down one-third, from 197 in 1996 to 131 this year.

By contrast, the number of political appointees at Education has grown by 19% since 1996, from 140 to 167.

Education is regarded as an executive-branch parking place for friends and campaign workers, particularly those who lack training for other administration posts, said Derrick Max, a former congressional staff member who dealt with education policy before joining the libertarian Cato Institute in 1998.

"You need to be a lawyer to work at Justice," Max said. "You need to know something about health to work at HHS. But everybody went to school."

The biggest growth at Education in Clinton's second term has come in the categories of "special assistant" and "confidential assistant," with salaries averaging $74,000 a year. The department added 30 such slots-a 28% increase since 1996.

While many of these employees are bright and well educated, it didn't hurt that they also had well-placed friends or relatives.

Sarah Staley, the president's goddaughter, is paid $58,027 as a special assistant in public affairs. After she'd worked briefly as a reporter, anchor and sales associate at television stations in Greenville, Miss., and Sulphur, Okla., Staley and her mother proposed the idea for "Bill Clinton: Rock & Roll President," a 1997 documentary on VH-1 television about Clinton's musical tastes. Angela J. Wilkins, sister-in-law of Transportation Secretary Rodney Slater and daughter of an Arkansas state lawmaker, is paid $68,570 to prepare briefings for Goode. She previously managed her mother's legislative office, sold real estate and volunteered in the 1992 Clinton campaign. In 1990, her resume says, she spent three weeks teaching night school classes in English, math and office machines.

Judith H. Wurtzel makes $49.32 an hour as an Education consultant developing a math tutoring program. She is a 1983 graduate of Yale University and a 1988 graduate of New York University Law School. Her father is Alan L. Wurtzel, vice chairman of Circuit City electronics stores, who along with his wife has donated $171,600 to Democratic causes since Clinton first ran for president.

The two men working at Education who have been linked to professional scandals elsewhere are Donald M. Feuerstein and Sterling Henry Jr.

Feuerstein, 62, joined Education as a special assistant in 1993, two years after being forced to resign as chief legal officer of Salomon Brothers after the firm covered up false bids submitted at Treasury bond auctions. Feuerstein was not individually sanctioned, but was cited by name in a Securities and Exchange Commission report as one of four senior executives who failed to act after learning about the fraud.

The report led Sen. Tom Daschle (D-S.D.), now minority leader, to return a 1990 Feuerstein campaign contribution of $1,000. But Feuerstein's role in the scandal "was never an issue" for the Education Department because he did not face criminal or civil charges, said Education spokeswoman Julie Green.

Feuerstein's connections at Harvard University-where he earned his law degree and raised money for the education school-helped him get his federal job. Feuerstein has since returned the favor. The government pays him a $91,410 salary, which he said he donates to his alma mater.

He is assigned to research student loan processes and construction tax credits. Apparently, Feuerstein said, he qualified by virtue of his Wall Street work, even though he served as a lawyer, not a banker. "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, so I'm the finance guy," he said.

Henry became a special assistant in the Historically Black Colleges section after running the Clinton-Gore campaign office in the District of Columbia in 1992. He took a vacation in 1995 to help bring out black voters for a Democratic gubernatorial candidate in Kentucky, where he was indicted for cashing checks made out to campaign workers. Though the amount involved was only $175, his guilty plea last year on theft and forgery charges brought him two years' probation and a court-ordered ban from Kentucky politics.

Henry, 40, receives $67,697 a year from Education to develop federal goals for helping black colleges. The department decided that no action against him was warranted, Green said, "due to the nature of the charges and his job performance here." Henry declined comment.

Other appointees at Education have been assigned to duties unrelated to education reform.

In 1997, General Counsel Judith Winston transferred out for a year to direct the president's race initiative, taking with her four special assistants on loan.

"It's not like she was going off on something that had nothing to do with education," Riley said. When asked the connection, he added: "It was a major thrust of the president, and we support the president."

Riley's scheduler, Regan Burke, organized a 1996 White House ceremony to celebrate Clinton's reelection effort while on the Education Department's time and dime, Green said. Burke, whose salary is $99,474, continues to supervise various White House events.

Stephanie Jones, Riley's Chicago regional representative, is taking a year's leave from her $93,198-a-year post to organize Mrs. Clinton's Millennium Tour. She is not being replaced.

Even junior staffers are drafted from all sections of the department-while remaining on Education's payroll-for tasks that range from handling requests for the president's appearances to arranging the first lady's travels.

For example, Education special assistants served as support staff for Mrs. Clinton during a Los Angeles synagogue stop, a mosque visit in Egypt and a dinner given by the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce on Michigan's Mackinac Island, an annual event for politicians and prospective campaign donors.

Diane Rossi, Education's White House liaison, explained the rationale: "When people go on assignment for the president, the vice president and the first lady, well, they're all very focused on education too."

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Times researchers John Beckham and Robin Cochran contributed to this article.

The Associated Press, November 12, 1999

By ANJETTA McQUEEN,
AP Education Writer

If schools get to hire new teachers under the class-size reduction plan just reached by President Clinton and congressional leaders, where would the extra classrooms come from?

And where are the skilled applicants willing to teach in urban or remote locations? What can help a district too small to hire even a single teacher under the population-based formula that's been agreed upon?

The questions puzzle educators, even though they welcome the president's bid for an army of 100,000 extra teachers in the next five years.

Despite this week's budget deal offering an additional $1.3 billion and greater leeway in how it's spent, hiring quality educators is far from a simple proposition once it gets to the local level.

"A teacher is just a teacher to most of the world," said Richard Spacek, superintendent of a 145-student district in the Ozark town of Raymondville, Mo. "But there are a lot of different issues out there. The big one for us is how do we entice someone to come into our community - it's not a very high pay base."

For the second year in a row, President Clinton has successfully argued that more schoolchildren, an aging teaching force and the demands for a well-read, savvy work force all cry out for making smaller classes a national priority.

He also won $450 million for after-school programs, an increase of $250 million. Funding for GEAR UP, a college preparation program, nearly doubled to $200 million.

The first round of money - $1.2 billion approved after a partisan budget debate last year - was doled out in July to most of the nation's 16,000 school districts.

Based on calculations of the number of poor children in a given area, the awards varied widely. Big, urban districts got tens of millions. The smallest or the wealthiest only got a few hundred dollars.

The Raymondville district received $7,000 in new-teacher funds: "We had to make up the difference and we're on a really tight budget," Spacek said.

Even if he gets more money this time around, Spacek worries about having enough classrooms to accommodate new teachers - or about having enough classroom space to accommodate computers.

"Facilities are almost impossible for a small district to build," he said. "The only way to do it is with a bond issue."

Additionally, school systems must find ways to attract or keep quality teachers. Under the new deal reached this week by Clinton and Republican lawmakers, the percentage of funds that could be used for training would increase from 15 percent to 25 percent.

The Milwaukee school system, which hired 97 teachers with its $6 million and brought the average early grade class-size down to 18, wants to focus on professional development.

"It's also a very critical part when you are working in urban environment," said Arlene Sershon, an administrator in the 155,000-student district. "Many teacher candidates or new employees are new to urban areas, and they need assistance in teaching and working with children in high concentrations of poverty."

Even in districts with enough room and skilled hires to reduce average class sizes, administrators still face the uncertainty of a lasting commitment: The agreement funds Clinton's five-year proposal for just one more year.

A 1,150-student district in East Helena, Mont., hired two teachers with its $33,000. The educators make about $16,000.

"We have tremendous fear about whether this is going to be funded on an annual basis," said superintendent Thomas Lockyer. "But we've learned if you don't take advantage of whatever is available at the time, somebody else gets those dollars."

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Charter Schools

The charter school movement has to deal with many "false friends": self-proclaimed supporters who quietly create new obstacles for struggling charter schools. In a *Wall Street Journal* editorial, "Charter Hypocrisy," we find that one of these "false friends" sits in the White House. Despite much rhetoric to the contrary, the Clinton Administration is busy throwing sand into the charter gears. In this instance, the Justice Department is seeking to close a K-8 school for at-risk children in Baton Rouge, citing decades-old desegregation laws. Apparently the racial balance of the neighboring schools is more important than retaining a successful school that parents want to keep.

In Laura Lang's long, perceptive "Dropping Out?," published in the *Washington City Paper*, we learn of another small school that parents love but that is being threatened with closure. Up to now it's been a "regular" public school, albeit one with rare success. Despite its strong academic record and popularity, however, District of Columbia officials have been angling to close down the Hearst school. This article details the lengthy and bitter battle between seemingly spiteful district officials and parents who were simply struggling to keep a good thing. In exasperation, the parents have decided to try to convert Hearst into a charter school.

Anna Bray Duff writes in the *Investor's Business Daily* that many parents whose cries for change have fallen on deaf ears with school administrators are now taking the initiative to determine just what their children are being taught. In "The Fight Over What Kids Learn," Duff points out that many parents are dismissing the progressivism that characterizes most public schools and turning instead to charter schools for more traditional curricula.

In Ohio, charter schools are meeting with strong hostility. Dennis J. Willard and Doug Oplinger's *Akron Beacon Journal* article, "Charter Experiment Goes Awry," paints a bleak (and we judge inaccurate) picture of the charter movement in the Buckeye state. You oughtn't believe everything you read, but you should see what charter enemies are up to.

On a lighter note, the University of California at San Diego, like several other institutions of higher learning, has created its own innovative charter school on campus. Julianne Bassinger describes this phenomenon in "Colleges Experiment with Charter Schools," originally published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*.

KLA

The Wall Street Journal, October 20, 1999

Charter Hypocrisy

"When I became president, there was one independent public charter school in all of America. With our support, there are 1,100 today. My budget assures that early in the next century, there will be 3,000."

—President Clinton,
1999 State of the Union address.

Another lie, it turns out. When it comes to actual treatment of the nation's fledgling charter schools, the Clinton Administration follows another policy: It tortures them.

Consider what it is doing to Louisiana's United Charter school. Back in 1995, Louisiana lawmakers surveyed their failing schools. After decades of desegregation orders, mandatory busing and so on, Louisiana school kids, half of whom are black, ranked 49th in the nation in overall achievement. Distressed, legislators passed one of the nation's more far-reaching laws for charter schools—public schools that are given autonomy to try their own educational approach without bureaucratic oversight. Among the new schools planned was United Charter, a K-8 center for 650 at-risk children in an abandoned mall in inner-city Baton Rouge. Again, bear in mind we're talking about a public school. Applications flowed in. "It's something our kids need," parent Estella Percy told the local paper.

This didn't sit well with Mr. Clinton's civil rights czar, Acting Assistant Attorney General Bill Lann Lee. To Mr. Lee and his fellow crusaders at Justice, it seems, the actual welfare of flesh-and-blood students ranks a distant second to abstract notions of "rights." Tucking a 43-year-old court desegregation decree under their collective arm, Mr. Lee's attorneys descended on Louisiana to block United Charter.

In meetings with local officials and school advocates, the Justice Department let it be known that it had concerns about the project, among them that the new school might draw too many white children from neighboring schools, upsetting those schools' racial balance. "What the parents want isn't important to me," a Justice official told Rolfe McCollister, a charter backer. "I'm interested in the law."

This struck locals as ridiculous. First of all, what matters more, skin color or education quality? Second, it wasn't clear that, after years of forced busing, there were enough whites in the community left to recruit even if United Charter sought to do so. As Roger Moser, the local system's school board president, told the Greater Baton Rouge Business Report, United Charter "has a chance of either improving education dramatically for blacks and/or evolving to the point it could be desegregated. But given the location it would have, I don't see any way it would ever become a high proportion of white kids."

Nonetheless, the feds continued to pepper the fragile project with questions. Particularly frustrating to locals was that the government's lawyers never laid out their case against the school on paper. Soon thoroughly intimidated, Baton Rouge authorities halted plans to open United Charter. That's why parents, represented by the Washington-based Institute for Justice, are now turning to the courts to try to resurrect their dream.

Unfortunately, United Charter is far from the only school to find itself harassed by Justice police. When SABIS International, a private school management firm, tried to open another charter school in St. Helena Parish, near the Mississippi River, the civil rights division used yet another desegregation order to block that project. The New Vision Charter School in Monroe was luckier. Though Justice had set its sites on the school, federal Judge F.A. Little Jr. let the project proceed.

This mode of attack on charter schools, moreover, is by no means confined to Louisiana. Nineteen of the 30 states that have charter laws also have areas that are under some sort of desegregation order, all potential battlefields for Justice litigators. In a recent hearing before Congress, Deputy Assistant Attorney General Anita Hodgkiss testified that the Justice Department has opposed charter schools in three other states: Texas, Mississippi and South Carolina.

Some argue that the never-confirmed Bill Lann Lee is the exception in an otherwise centrist Administration. In fact, Mr. Lee represents more the pattern than the exception. His counterpart at the civil rights division of the Education Department, Norma Cantu, spent months harassing another infant school, New York City's Young Womens Leadership School, with the threat that its single-sex program was discriminatory. According to Kimberly Schuld of the Independent Women's Forum, Ms. Cantu backed off only after her boss at education, Richard Riley, began making repeated positive references to charter schools in speeches.

We wish we had confidence that the exposure of the Administration's ongoing hypocrisy toward charter schools would shame it into better behavior. But so long as the Democratic Party's future is tied to the teachers unions, the opposite is more likely.

Washington City Paper, October 22, 1999

Dropping Out?

By Laura Lang

A school system that's struggling to reform itself can't seem to accommodate schools that are already working.

Six-year-old Ivan Oliver is a problem student. That is, he *was* a problem student, back when he started kindergarten at Phoebe Hearst Elementary School in the fall of 1998. Charlie Oliver and Claudia Pabo had adopted Ivan* only a few months before from an orphanage in Cherepovts, a city in the northern part of Russia. By the time he went to school, Ivan could speak only a few words of English and had a hard time paying attention in class. He spent most of the time wandering about the classroom. Staffers realized Ivan was having a hard time fitting in when they found him perched on a jungle gym, peeing onto the pavement below while the rest of the kids played around him.

But Ivan's teacher, Brenda Burns, saw some sparks behind Ivan's slightly crossed gray eyes. In her 17 years at Hearst, a school that teaches pre-kindergarten through third-grade students, Burns had seen plenty of kids with conflicted backgrounds and believed that there were ways to teach someone like Ivan. During the first few months of class, she spent time working individually with him, finding ways to engage him in class and conversation. She learned that he was well-spoken in his native tongue, and that back in Russia, he would tag along with the orphanage custodian, helping to change light bulbs and build toy boats. Ivan was fond of singing along to a piano.

Burns' interest in Ivan was returned. He found a level of comfort with his teacher that was hard to come by in a new school and an unknown country. By the end of the first few weeks, he had started to call Burns "Mama," using the only word he knew that would describe the warmth and interest she'd shown, says Ivan's father. Gradually, Ivan became more engaged in class, paying attention to his course work and engaging socially with his classmates. His innate intelligence, skilled teachers, and accommodating school all added up to a very different student by the end of the year. Ivan had become an academic star in his kindergarten class and was growing wise to American slang. After one teachable moment last year, says Burns, a rapt Ivan responded with a short pause and then: "Wow. No shit."

"It was like—what's his name?—Rip Van Winkle, where he wakes up and the world is new," says Burns, now a pre-kindergarten teacher at Garrison Elementary School. "It was so wonderful to see him take delight in everything around him....[Ivan] has just an unbelievable perceptiveness about people and language and what it all means."

Had Ivan been put into one of many other District schools, he might have been marginalized and perhaps ended up as a special education case. But Hearst isn't like most D.C. schools. A small institution set in swanky Cleveland Park, Hearst has high standardized test scores, students from all quarters of the city, and a reputation as a school that works in a school system that doesn't.

In fact, though, the very things that make Hearst Hearst—its small size, its service to out-of-boundary kids, its choice location—are the same things that have led, almost, to its undoing. District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) officials considered closing the school twice in the 1990s. And even though Hearst survived, it picked up some deep bruises. Last year, after months of conflicts between parents and then-Principal Shirley Hopkinson, Superintendent Arlene Ackerman transferred Hopkinson—which made Hearst parents very happy—but she also transferred two of the school's most popular teachers—which made Hearst parents very angry. Burns was one of them.

The transfers were followed by a mass exodus of teachers, and many parents took their kids elsewhere. Those who remained feared that the go-round over the principal had brought the school one step closer to extinction. Add in the set-tos around closings and staffing, and die-hard Hearst parents thought the school might be better off outside of a system that too long considered it an easy target. Last summer, they decided to submit an application to make Hearst one of the city's newest charter schools. As a charter, the school would receive public funds diverted from DCPS money but would operate independently of the school system.

"I viewed [the transfers] as a declaration of war on our particular little neighborhood," says Charlie Oliver. "I believe that if you put the control of schools in hands of parents, they would be better off than if either the school board or Ackerman had any involvement....Just get downtown out of the picture. Sell the administration building. Just eliminate them and send checks. That would be far superior."

Not everyone at Hearst is as ready to bolt as Oliver. And there's a long way to go before the charter-school idea becomes a reality. Whether it happens or not, the parents at Hearst are sending a strong signal to the central administration that there could be consequences if DCPS leadership continues to push them around. The charter option allows dissatisfied parents real leverage, a chance to speak out in a way they've never done before—not just by taking their children to another school, but by taking their school along with them. Given the current state of public education in the District, the prospect of DCPS losing even some of its better-prepared kids and more involved parents is a scary one.

"Hearst is a microcosm of a major aspect...of what's wrong with our public system—that it is not sensitive to [schools that are] good and nurturing," says At-Large D.C. Councilmember Phil Mendelson, a former advisory neighborhood commissioner in the Hearst area. "The parents are sick of it. I think this is a test for the school system. The school system is going to have to figure it out and give some assurances to Hearst, or I think it's going to lose Hearst."

Ackerman, for one, agrees that charter schools have the potential to drain public schools of financial and other resources—for little or no payback. "Right now, they're untested," she says. "So we have to see if they do a better job, if they're going to be an answer."

Ackerman says she tries not to worry too much, focusing instead on improving existing schools so that parents won't feel the need to go looking for education elsewhere. "I hope that we will create some systemic reform initiatives that will allow parents and the schools to feel that they can stay within the school system and they can thrive," she says.

But Ackerman has to put a positive spin on what could become an ominous trend. There are other people close to the system who are a little more open with their concerns. They've watched as parents and teachers at one high-performing school, Paul Junior High School, set out to convert the school to a charter; the process now seems well on its way. If Hearst is only the first school to follow in line, the worst-case predictions—that charters will drain the school system of the best and the brightest—may come true, perhaps more quickly than anyone thought possible.

"The worst thing that could come from this charter-school spin is that all activist parents would get out of DCPS and leave the system as a warehouse for residual students," notes schools watchdog and DCPS parent Philip J. Blair Jr. "I fear that."

Things are rarely calm at Hearst, and this morning is no different. Of course, stillness is hard to come by in a room full of 20 4-year-olds. They sit in a quasi-circle on the edge of a bright square of carpet in Carla Hillery's prekindergarten class as the clock clicks past 9, squirming and chattering away until the room feels as if it might crack open.

The controversy this morning surrounds a new student, Anastassia, a towheaded girl dressed in a Barbie-pink sweat suit and bright gold earrings, who has, as two of the girls report, ignored their inquires about her name and origin. Hillery sits atop a small wooden chair at the edge of the carpet, already looking exhausted, and explains that Anastassia is not responding because Anastassia does not speak English.

That's good enough for the kids. They're used to this kind of thing. In most schools, "diversity" is a cliché that lives mostly in the printed handouts from the principal; it generally means that a handful of students don't match the dominant skin color of the student body. At Hearst, there is no dominant skin color—not really. The school population is largely an even split between white and black kids, and there are reasonable numbers of Latino and Asian children. Like Ivan, Anastassia is Russian—which is more than the kids need to know. They hear her name and can think only of the animated movie with the same title. "I have that video," gasps Julia.

Julia turns out to be Anastassia's new best friend, charged with showing her around the large classroom during "choice time," the part of the day when the kids get to scatter to different stations in the room. Holding Anastassia by the hand, Julia drags her from table to table, blabbering enthusiastically as she describes the stations for drawing, for reading, for playing with Play-Doh. Anastassia may not understand a word Julia says, but she seems pleased enough to have the company.

The two finally settle in at a table used to practice lettering. Anastassia picks up her backpack and pulls out a few books in her native language. "Nalle Puh" reads the title of one, atop a picture of the round little bear most of the kids in the room know as "Winnie-the-Pooh." As Anastassia flips through the pages, reading them aloud in Russian, another girl, Gabrielle, sits down next to her. "I speak French, too," she says, helpfully.

It's a lovely picture, but it's not the only reason that District parents drive their kids over hill and dale to get to Hearst. Parents say they're drawn to the school because of its small size (170 students), its commitment to early-childhood education, and its strong support from parents who are happy to lavish their time, money, and endless energy on the school.

In 1990, DCPS designated Hearst a "demonstration center," which meant that teachers and administrators would come from all over the system to learn about its program. The school's curriculum emphasizes both academic and social learning, and includes class time for art, dance, and music. The "responsive classroom" technique, another hallmark of the Hearst program, combines group and solo activities, structured lessons and open-ended projects.

Those elements have combined to create a school that attracts people from all the various corners of the city, who latch on to Hearst not only as a place that educates their child, but as if Hearst itself were their own flesh and blood.

When that child—er, school—is in danger, parents react with ferocious protectiveness. Back in 1993, DCPS administrators first considered closing the school in an effort to cut costs for a financially strapped school system, but opted to shut down a couple of others instead. When the then–newly appointed D.C. Emergency Transitional Education Board of Trustees, a board created to oversee management of public schools and included then–Chief Executive Julius W. Becton Jr., came back to try to shutter the school anew in 1997, parents activated a network of media manipulating, grass-roots organizing, and loud, sustained protest to send administrators scrambling in search of other targets. In the end, the board agreed to spare the school, but only by a single vote.

It's not as if the system's officials didn't have their reasons for preying on Hearst. It served only a handful of District kids, a majority of whom were from out of its boundaries. And, more important, at least from the perspective of DCPS, Hearst occupied some very precious real estate in Cleveland Park, valued at $1.89 million in 1997.

But what looked like a honey pot of money to school officials was revealed as a hornets' nest when they tried to put Hearst on the block. Hearst parents are very savvy defenders who can run circles around the system when the school comes under attack. The last threat even bred a mantra: "Don't close it. Clone it." Parents believe that they have constructed an educational model that is far more valuable than a one-time infusion of cash for the system. And the brushes with closing have left parents at the school suspicious and ready to start shooting the minute an unfriendly head peeks over the horizon.

"I know, as a former Hearst parent, there is always lurking in their minds: When is it going to happen again?" says Tonya Vidal Kinlow, a former Hearst PTA president and now an at-large member of the elected D.C. Board of Education. "It's disruptive to the lives of the children and everyone else that's there."

And even after the DCPS officials decided that they couldn't sell the place without taking a massive hit from its tiny band of adherents, they seemed to find other ways to get the people at Hearst angry. When then-Principal Hopkinson, new to the school in the fall of 1998, was tagged as being inaccessible and insensitive to student and parent concerns, the business of staffing the school became a tug of war between the parents and the administration. The administration stood by Hopkinson, even though it was clear she lacked the support she needed to run the school.

It got worse: When parents complained in December about an unidentified dust that lay on desks in one of the kindergarten rooms, for example, Hopkinson dismissed the concerns, say several parents. Days later, DCPS officials tested the substance and found that the dust came from lead paint and had significant toxic implications. That fiasco, along with several others, was enough to permanently damage Hopkinson in the eyes of many Hearst parents.

"I found [Hopkinson] condescending, demeaning, distant, unresponsive, inaccessible," says former Hearst parent Mina Veazie, who has since moved her son to a charter school. (Hopkinson, now principal at Barnard Elementary, declined to comment, directing all questions to Ackerman. "I'm not working at Hearst any longer," Hopkinson said.)

Parents say they got the runaround when they took their complaints to Hopkinson's superiors, such as then–Assistant Superintendent Audrey Donaldson. (Donaldson has since left DCPS for the Chicago school system. She did not return a call for comment.) Finally, last spring, Ackerman made a personal visit to the school, to interview the principal and teachers. The next day, she granted a voluntary transfer to Hopkinson. Unfortunately for Ackerman, she also gave involuntary transfers to two popular teachers, Burns and Karen Dresden.

Parents were furious. They circulated a petition protesting Burns' transfer, gathering the signatures of about 85 percent of parents. The effort did nothing to change Ackerman's mind. "I felt like there needed to be an opportunity for that school to rebuild the climate," says Ackerman now. "Certainly, it was so divided at that point, we needed to give people the opportunity to start over."

But it didn't end there. Aside from Dresden and Burns, four of the other nine classroom teachers also transferred to other DCPS schools or left the system altogether. Then another two asked to be transferred. Their requests were denied, they were told, because of a systemwide policy to cut off teacher transfers for the year.

As for Hearst, parents worried that the hemorrhage of teachers would be fatal for the school. A lack of experienced educators could kill the model program and dissuade many parents from staying, they feared, meaning the school district might be more likely to close Hearst. If DCPS wouldn't protect Hearst, they reasoned, they'd do it themselves. That's when the charter gambit became a weapon—and a potent one at that—in the parents' battle to maintain custody of the school's future.

In July, parents from the Hearst PTA submitted the application to convert the school to a charter. "We feel as if we were driven to this point," says Andrea Carlson, who worked to compile the application, which was approved by about 50 parents.

Meanwhile, DCPS hired a new principal and teachers. The parents thought that, for the time being, the school had been saved. In August, they changed their application from a conversion request to a petition to create a new charter school. The revised application meant that parents could build a new school based on the Hearst education model, but would not have any claim to the Hearst building. Unlike conversion requests, the new application didn't require eventual approval by two-thirds of the school's parents and teachers. Only the ones who wanted to go would leave.

In September, the D.C. Public Charter School Board, one of the two boards in the city that reviews charter-school applications, gave first-stage approval to the Hearst parents' application. The petitioning parents will resubmit the application in January and could open their charter as early as next fall. They may also defer for another year.

"I don't think it's something we can afford to drop, because the school is vulnerable, and we need to ensure [its] longevity," says Carlson. "And the future is very unpredictable in DCPS."

A day's worth of rain has smeared the handmade sign posted in front of Hearst one September evening. But you can still make out the words: "Back to School Night." The flaw only adds to the building's schoolhouse charm. A large, red-brick structure with a wide red door, Hearst sits near the corner of 37th and Tilden Streets NW, behind the sprawling campus of the exclusive Sidwell Friends School. Large, comfortable single-family homes spread from the building on all sides.

Inside, the current Hearst principal, Betty Shamwell, starts the festivities with a greeting in broken Spanish, in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month and the parents and students who speak Spanish—and there are many. Shamwell stands on a small stage at the head of the "Big Room," a large rectangular area used for meetings, as well as for the kids' drama and dance classes. A former assistant principal at Bruce-Monroe Elementary school, Shamwell has had decades of experience in early-childhood education. She's genuinely warm and friendly, with a smile that beams a welcome to everyone in attendance. Parents say she's a good addition to the school, and they give her high marks for leadership and an ability to reach out to the small children who fill Hearst's halls.

After Shamwell speaks, the teachers parade across the stage to introduce themselves, to hearty applause. PTA President Anne Herr gives a short speech and is followed by parent Lisa Greenman, who talks about the latest fundraising project. For many parents, everything at Hearst seems as it should be—for now, anyway. They're content to wait it out and see if Hearst can survive in the system. The charter effort, in the minds of some, is an insurance policy they hope they won't have to use, but will surely cash in if—and probably when—the school system makes another move on the embattled school. "My hope is that Hearst is not going to need to become a charter school," Greenman says later. "If we were assured that the school would be permitted to thrive as part of DCPS, I think that's where we would prefer to be."

The parents' commitment to the public form of education is more than rhetoric. There are parents, many of whom could afford private schools, who sought out Hearst because they wanted their kids to benefit from the publicness of public schools. To many of them, citizenship in the District includes a commitment to the school system in spite of its manifest deficiencies.

That's why the charter option is seen as a last resort, to be kept behind glass that will be broken only if efforts to educate their children in an environment carefully crafted to produce excellence are monkeyed with. For many, the idea of turning Hearst into a charter goes against their philosophy of education.

"What I wanted was an administration that worked," says Greenman. "I didn't want to opt out of that....I wanted to see reform from within spreading out....I really think public schools should work for everyone."

But when those two values come head to head—saving public education or saving Hearst—it's not even a close call. "Although I was reluctant to see our community pursue [the charter option], I felt it was necessary to do so," says Greenman. "I feel like there's a need for a place like Hearst to exist, and I'm not confident that DCPS is supportive of that."

The parents see a host of practical problems along the path to creating a charter school. They are not a naive bunch, and the sheer logistics of building a school almost from scratch are daunting. Many of them are putting as much as they can into the school as it is.

"I just see it as more hard work," says parent Denise Nwaezeapu. "I view charter schools as more vulnerability than security."

Getting first-stage clearance from the charter school board was a big accomplishment. But making Hearst a charter would translate into serious homework for parents already balancing jobs and child-rearing. By now, they believe that Hearst's educational model is a moveable feast, but they would have to either find and hire a board of trustees and other staff or run the school themselves.

Fundraising would have to go beyond the already constant rounds of selling everything from gift wrap to sweat shirts. To create a school similar to Hearst in program and size, they would have to come up with the equivalent of the $900,000 yearly budget the school district sets aside for the school, which covers most costs specific to the school, like staff salaries, supplies, and textbooks.

According to the 1995 D.C. School Reform Act, which laid the groundwork for charter schools in the District, new schools are entitled to the same per pupil funding as regular public schools: a $5,500 base payment, with additional money allocated on the basis of age and special programs. Hearst parents hope to get about $6,500 per pupil, according to the application they filed, which would amount to about $1,235,000 for a 190-student population. Parents also say that additional funding from the PTA and school activities could tack on another $35,000 a year. They plan to apply for a start-up grant from the federal government, which could bring in another $100,000, according to an application they submitted this summer.

If all of it came through, it would add up to a significant amount, well over the yearly DCPS budget for Hearst. But DCPS also currently pays for significant overhead costs, including record-keeping, computers, and janitorial service, that are not included in the specific Hearst budget. If Hearst parents do create a charter school, they will have to cover those overhead fees, as well as start-up costs, like recruitment and training for new hires.

It's a problem that all of the other 27 charter schools in the District faced when they started out, and many have gotten past the challenge by teaming up with big corporations or nonprofit groups. Hearst parents hope to get resources from the D.C.-based National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Greenfield, Mass.–based Northeast Foundation for Children, both national nonprofits that provide training and support in early education. But so far, they have no real commitments from any large organizations. Carlson says that parents had little time for outreach when they submitted the first application, but that they plan to expand their efforts in the next few months. "That's certainly something that, in the next phase of planning, we'll be concentrating on," she says.

Hearst parents would also have to find a new home for their charter family. If DCPS closed the public school, as some think will happen, the parents could lease or buy its—very expensive—building, which would only add on to their yearly costs. If that building did not become available, they'd be on their own in finding new digs.

Ackerman says she has no intention of closing Hearst and says DCPS has invested in the school over the summer by hiring new staff and making some renovations to the building, like adding new windows.

But new windows aren't the type of commitment some parents demand. They would prefer changes in Ackerman's fundamental ideas for school-system reform, which some say are antithetical to Hearst's concept. Ackerman's attachment to Stanford 9 achievement tests and standards-based evaluations of schools, for example, has some parents worried that a unique program like Hearst's might be squashed down into the DCPS box.

"I'm actually more passionate about [the charter effort] now," says Hearst parent Karl Jentoft, who is married to Anne Herr. "I think Betty Shamwell is a very nice principal, and she's done a great job of preventing a collapse of the school.... But she's on a one-year contract....

"Last year's problems are over," adds Jentoft. "I think there's a whole set of new problems now. The program hasn't recovered.... You may be able to create a decent school called Hearst Elementary School, but it won't be the same program. I'm pessimistic that [Ackerman is] flexible enough to include Hearst as it was."

Ackerman says standardized tests are only the beginning of her ideas for reform, and that future types of evaluation, like writing tests, will accommodate more programs like Hearst's. "How do you know how well you're doing unless you can compare yourself?" she asks. "If you look at school districts that are really progressive, they're already doing [standardized tests]. We're just catching up from behind."

But Ward 3 Councilmember Kathy Patterson, who represents the ward where Hearst is located, claims that if a school like Hearst has to leave the system to thrive, that could be a setback for larger school reform. "It can be detrimental to the public perception of school reform if a school feels it must become a charter school to survive," she says. "I hope that's not what's happening here."

Paul Junior High presents another clear and present threat to business as usual at DCPS. Hearst and Paul have almost nothing in common as educational institutions—not size, not look, not location, not student body. But the one thing they do share—a way of working for the kids who attend them—is the reason people at both schools are thinking of leaving the administration behind.

Housed in a massive three-story building in the middle of the Brightwood neighborhood in Northwest, Paul serves about 775 kids, most of them from the neighborhood, most of them black. The area around the school is largely residential, like Hearst's. But the homes are narrow row houses or boxy, brick apartment buildings—nice homes that give a good neighborhood feel, but hardly as stately as their Cleveland Park counterparts.

The school has a sort of academic rags-to-riches story that rarely happens in DCPS. Back in the 1980s, Paul students performed poorly on standardized tests, their scores falling in the bottom half of all District students', except in science. Enrollment also declined steadily in the late 1980s. In 1990, the school had a population of only about 450 students, less than two-thirds its capacity.

Paul's academic savior, current Principal Cecile Middleton, came to the school in 1990. A longtime District educator, Middleton has experience as both a teacher and a school administrator. Parents and school advocates praise Middleton as a good leader and reform-minded educator. But Middleton is not vocal about the charter process, rarely talking to the press for fear of complicating her efforts. "I'm not a person who pushes *me*," she says. "I'm a person who pushes children. I believe every child is due a good education."

At Paul, Middleton initiated the kind of sweeping reform that many District schools will have to undergo in order for the system as a whole to prosper. She started by moving and renovating a rundown library and adding space for new classrooms, says Paul teacher Bill Kappenhagen. Middleton also revamped the school curriculum, cutting out classes like home economics to make room for a greater emphasis on basic education. She added a few extras to the idea of "basic," making Spanish mandatory for Paul students and including class time for visual and performing arts. The new, revised Paul also has an extended schedule for structured clubs and other activities, as well as mentoring programs with community and other groups, like the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and the consulting firm Booz Allen & Hamilton Inc.

Middleton's efforts, according to parents, have turned the school around. Since 1990, both enrollment and test scores have gone up. Last year, more than 80 percent of Paul students scored at the basic level or better on the Stanford 9 test for reading; about half scored Basic or better on the math portion. Paul students go on to attend some of the best high schools in the city, like the School Without Walls and the Duke Ellington School of the Arts.

Not everyone's been supportive of Middleton's reforms. School officials have "stymied" a number of Paul's initiatives, notes Kappenhagen, either by direct intervention or by the sheer hassle they have created for coordination efforts. DCPS heads put the brakes on plans to send a couple of Paul teachers to a national conference for professional development. They also put a kink in a program with nearby Whittier Elementary, which used to send some of its highest-performing students to Paul to attend classes. "Because of the logistics of getting it straight with the District, we just gave up," says Kappenhagen.

In 1997, Middleton and Paul teachers thought they could navigate the road of reform more deftly without a big, broken school system dragging behind them. That summer, they submitted an application to the D.C. Public Charter School Board to convert Paul to a charter school.

But the type of DCPS complications that had driven Paul teachers to seek a charter also stalled their efforts—at least temporarily. In the fall of 1997, DCPS officials had to delay the start of the school year to make repairs to school buildings, like Paul's, that couldn't meet fire-code standards without last-minute patch-ups. The delay meant that Paul teachers couldn't meet up with parents in time to gather the signatures needed for a conversion by the October deadline, says Kappenhagen. So Middleton applied again the next year; again, the school opening was delayed and the teachers came up short of signatures

Paul teachers decided to apply a third time, and this time, they got started in the spring. They scored the needed signatures and the board's approval this September. Paul is scheduled to open as a charter school next fall.

Middleton and others like to say that their conversion is about improving the school system, not leaving it. They hope their charter status will allow them to be a research-and-development branch for the larger system. "Paul will always be a public school," she says. "It's just that it'll be operating independently of the Board of Education."

But to many, the move looks like an effort to get away from a school system that has little to offer Paul. "That's really a vote of no confidence in the system," says DCPS parent and school activist Susan Gushue. "What Paul is saying is, 'We're better off without the services that the larger system can give us.' That's really an indictment. People should take that very seriously."

Paul's not in the clear for a conversion just yet. The charter legislation says conversion charters should be able to remain in their buildings, but DCPS hasn't come up with the same interpretation, says Nelson Smith, executive director of the D.C. Public Charter School Board. Last year, the elected school board passed a resolution that says it has to conduct reviews of all empty buildings to see if they should be used for alternative or special education. Ackerman says school officials have to give a once-over to the Paul building to see if it's needed elsewhere in DCPS.

But Robert Cane, executive director of Friends of Choice in Urban Schools (FOCUS), a local nonprofit, says DCPS already has plenty of empty space to work with without Paul's building. "The irony here is that there are approximately 3 million square feet of empty space in DCPS," says Cane. "So it's very hard to make the argument that the [Paul] school building is needed for either of those purposes."

Ackerman says DCPS and the Board of Education have not yet decided what to do about the Paul building. "We have to see what the community wants," says Ackerman. "This has now triggered a process we'll have to put in place that looks at the entire issue."

Whatever the outcome, Paul teachers still hope to open as a charter next fall. When they do, they could very well be blazing the trail for others who want to take a similar route out of DCPS, their schools in tow. "I think all eyes are on us to see how we do," says Kappenhagen. "If we're successful and the District doesn't improve drastically, we'll see an influx [of interest in going charter]."

On their own, and even together, Hearst and Paul hardly seem like a threat to a behemoth organization like DCPS. After all, even when you add up the numbers, the schools account for fewer than 1,000 kids in a system with more than 70,000. But these two are only part of a much larger charter-school movement, one of the largest in the country. In only three years, D.C. has been breeding ground for 30 charter schools. Twenty-seven of those are currently operating and enroll almost 7,000 students—most of whom came from DCPS schools, says FOCUS's Cane. Cane estimates that another 1,500 students are on waiting lists to attend existing charter schools.

Parents and students at Hearst and Paul would not be the first to leave the school system bound for charters. But they would be the first to tote their successful school programs along with them. And some fear that Hearst and Paul could be leaders with long lines of followers. "I don't see it as a slow death," says Gushue. "I think one day we'll wake up and find that half our schools are charter schools."

Some charter-school advocates argue that such a proposition would offer "healthy competition" for DCPS. "I see a future where half of schools in the District are charter schools," says Richard Wenning, a former DCPS administrator who now heads Wenning Associates, which provides administrative support to charter schools. "That's very possible and very desirable."

But some education watchdogs say it's still too early to count on charters as a way to reform the school system. "We have not had enough charter schools in enough places to say that competition works, that it really improves schools," says Delabian Rice-Thurston, executive director of Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools, a local group of parent and teacher advocates. "We've had competition from tons of successful private schools, and it did not lead principals to say, 'What can I do to recapture these kids?'"

Board of Education member Vidal Kinlow says that the District may not be able to support a system in which half the schools are charters. "I don't know that it would be very healthy for the public school system to have a 50-50 split," she says. "It becomes almost impossible to maintain."

Right now, the D.C. Public Charter School Board and the Board of Education's subcommittee on charter schools, which Vidal Kinlow chairs, oversee the 27 charter schools currently operating. Each body can approve 10 new charters a year, for a total of 20. The D.C. School Reform Act has a five-year life span, but most charter-school advocates plan on pushing for an extension, says Vidal Kinlow. If the extension is granted and the growth of charter schools continues at its rapid pace, District officials will have to come up with a way to build a body to oversee all those charter schools.

"We're going to need to look at how we create a more systematic oversight mechanism, which means creating another bureaucracy," says Vidal Kinlow.

Ward 7 D.C. Councilmember Kevin Chavous, who chairs the council's Committee on Education, remains hopeful, noting that the existence of charter schools has encouraged DCPS administrators to cede more control to parents and teachers. "I like the idea of giving more authority to these schools," says Chavous. "I think public schools are headed in that direction. For some schools, we may not be moving in that direction fast enough."

In the meantime, some worry that the supposed give-and-take relationship between charter and regular schools may be a little one-sided. Obviously, every time a student chooses a charter school over a regular public school, the system loses a portion of its funding.

Virginia Walden, executive director of D.C. Parents for School Choice, a local nonprofit that provides school information to parents, says the difference shouldn't matter, because the system then has one less child to educate.

But it's not that easy. Since DCPS puts a portion of its per pupil revenue into systemwide expenses, the system comes up short when kids leave, says Mary Levy, director for the Public Education Project at the Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights. School officials can eventually downsize those systemwide costs, on the basis of decreases in students, but the process isn't an immediate one, says Levy. "[DCPS] can't cut costs nearly as fast as enrollment declines," she says.

That's exactly the reason parents choose charter schools, say advocates: because more money goes directly to their kids. "DCPS is given more money every year, and we're still talking about 'reforming.' Something's not working," says Walden. "[Charter schools] are taking less money and having more successes. They ought to get off the money kick. There needs to be another argument."

There is: Public school advocates say the system's greatest loss is not of money, but of parents, students, and teachers who are committed to education. "When parents make their choices and choose with their feet, you're losing resources in a lot of different ways," says Vidal Kinlow.

Mary Budd, publications director for Boston-based Advantage Schools Inc., which assists 16 charter schools around the country, including one in D.C., says she's tired of this "skimming" argument. According to Budd, most charter schools develop in underserved areas, and cater to low-income and minority students—not the sort of cream-of-the-crop students charter-school foes have in mind.

That theory may usually be true, but in the cases of Hearst and Paul, the schools looking to leave the school system are among the system's best. If other schools follow in line, the trend could become just the drain of resources some fear. "I don't want to see parents who choose and who are active enough to choose a school like Hearst leaving the public school system," says Rice-Thurston. "They have been strong advocates. It's a small school, but it has powerful parents. They work for that school."

Ivan Oliver doesn't really like to talk about school. Of course, not many 6-year-olds do. He tells me a little about recess and about tunes he sings in music class, like "Jingle Bells" and "Frère Jacques," but when I ask too much, he cuts me off. "Shhh. No talking," he says. "Let's be quiet."

Ivan is swinging from a rope his father has managed to drape over a high, high tree limb in the family's back yard. He's got only a few minutes before he has to head off to school. He wants to enjoy them in peace.

Ivan's parents say their son has had a hard time adjusting to the new Hearst. He misses Burns and can't understand why she's not his teacher anymore—or, at the very least, at the school. So far this year, says Ivan's mom, her son has called his new teacher a "liar" and a "butt."

Ivan's still swinging out back. I push him a little more on the subject. He pauses, seeming pensive—more thoughtful than I thought a 6-year-old could be. "She's a stranger," he says of his new teacher. "She looks like a stranger to me."

Ivan's only 6. It can be hard to please a 6-year-old. Besides, he'll eventually get over losing Burns. But his parents are also troubled. His father continues to write letters to school and government officials, asking that something be done about last year's forced transfers. Ivan's mother is hopeful about the new year, but admits she's worried how Hearst will continue to thrive under a standards-focused Ackerman administration. "There are times when you wonder whether Ackerman wants to bring schools up to those [like Hearst] or bring [those] schools down to others," she says as we walk Ivan to school one weekday morning.

When we arrive at the Hearst playground, Ivan runs off to join the students already lining up with their respective teachers. He has put on his round, plastic glasses, which are covered with corrective tape to help with his crossed eyes. I saw him exactly like this when I visited Hearst weeks before, but I didn't know him at the time. Even so, this little boy with a mop of blond hair and weird glasses walked up to me and gave me a quick hug on the way into the building.

It's hard not to get swept up into the Hearst family. It's a warm, tight-knit community that you probably wouldn't find at most schools, certainly not with the same mix of people. You can almost understand why parents get so gaga about saving the school, with or without DCPS.

"It seems DCPS wants all schools to look the same," says PTA President Herr. "If that's the case, they should embrace charter schools.... I would really rather see a public school system that is responsive to the community. I think that would be a good outcome for everyone. But I don't think we're headed that way." **CP**

Investor's Business Daily, November 29, 1999

THE FIGHT OVER WHAT KIDS LEARN

Parents Use Charter Schools To Change Curriculum

By Anna Bray Duff
Investor's Business Daily

Of all the contentious issues facing public schools, one stands out: curriculum.

When it's time to update the curriculum or get new class materials, school boards all over the country face what's known as the curriculum wars: the fight between parents who want to see schools take a more traditional approach and those who want the schools to focus on progressive education.

Still, many parents — none more so than traditionalists — often feel their input isn't welcome when it comes to deciding what is taught, and how. Frozen out of the decision-making process, some parents are setting up schools that embody their own vision of education.

In 34 states and the District of Columbia, parents can set up charter schools — which give them the authority and the funds to change how their kids are educated.

And a number of groups critical of progressive education — the reigning orthodoxy in the public schools — are helping them find the classroom materials they need to put their vision into practice.

The charter-school trend may make public schools take parents' concerns more seriously by showing how many parents are drawn to these schools. After all, there are fewer issues parents care more about than what gets taught in public schools, and how it gets done.

> "You get the feeling as a parent that you can't know nearly as much as the education establishment. They'll listen to you, but that's about all."
>
> **— Kelli Kreienkamp,**
> *mother, licensed teacher and co-founder of the Verona Core Knowledge Charter School*

The Princeton Charter School in New Jersey is an example.

When some parents couldn't sway the school board to adopt what they viewed as a more rigorous curriculum, they started their own school, offering kindergarten through eighth grade.

Chiara Nappi, now a visiting physics professor at the University of Southern California and one-time Princeton school board member, recounts her experience in "Why Charter Schools? The Princeton Story," published by the Fordham Foundation.

Nappi and other parents felt the elementary and middle schools didn't offer a coherent curriculum. What students learned depended on what the teacher wanted to teach. And that flexibility, they felt, often gave math and science short shrift.

What's more, she says, it left many parents unable to judge how well the schools were really doing.

"In theory, there was a curriculum, but you couldn't understand when students were supposed to learn what," Nappi said. "It never said, 'Students should learn,' or 'Students should know,' but instead that they should experience something. What does that mean?"

Nappi, with other parents, was troubled by studies showing a growing gap between poor, minority students and wealthier, white students within the prestigious Princeton school system.

"What the students learned depended totally on what the teacher wanted to do, and that left gaps in their education that might never be filled," Nappi said.

They set out to reform the curriculum — but didn't get very far.

Some pointed to the district's sky-high SAT scores to show the schools were among the best in the country.

When the "curriculumists" – as Nappi and the other parents were dubbed – pointed out that not all children were doing that well, their opponents said the real problem was low self-esteem. Until the school system stopped alienating minority children, they wouldn't be able to do challenging schoolwork.

Maureen Quirk, an electrical engineer, was one of those trying to change the curriculum. She joined the effort after seeing the limited exposure to math and science that her young daughter got.

"By the time my daughter was in fifth grade, I realized the system wasn't going to change," Quirk said. "We just did a lot ourselves, with private math and foreign language lessons. But it rankled that we had to teach these things ourselves when we got it in the schools."

Armed with a 1996 New Jersey law allowing charter schools, Quirk and several others started the Princeton Charter School.

"We had gone to the schools to ask for a more academically challenging strand within the elementary schools, and I felt they were laughing at us," Quirk said.

"But when we started, 25% of all eligible students in the district applied to our charter school — and we didn't even have an address yet," she said. Last year, the school got 250 applications for its 26 open slots.

"If we had only been concerned with our own children, we would never have set up a public charter school," she added. "It's very much simpler to do some home schooling or send children to a private school. But there were disadvantaged children who were suffering and were losing ground."

Their experience trying to reform the district's curriculum gave Quirk and others a clear idea of what they wanted in their charter schools.

Other parents aiming to start charter schools with a focus on traditional content and methods have turned to outside resources — many available for free on the Web.

For example, the Core Knowledge Foundation publishes a complete curriculum for kindergarten through eighth grade based on the ideas of E.D. Hirsch, a leading critic of today's schools.

Other parents, worried about "fuzzy" math, look to textbook analyses put out by a group of mathematicians and scientists known as Mathematically Correct. And parents who want phonics instruction can look to resources such as the National Right to Read Foundation.

"There are many parents out there now with Ph.D.s and Master's degrees, and with the Internet they have the ability to communicate their views and their own knowledge to a lot of people," said Christian Braunlich, president of the free-market Alexis de Tocqueville Institute and member of the Fairfax, Va., school board. "They are not going to defer to the school system anymore."

Braunlich argues school choice can help resolve what has become an impossible conflict for public school systems.

"Look at the amount of energy expended in this country trying to decide what works better — is it better to have uniforms or not, phonics or whole language, Core Knowledge or critical thinking?" he said. "If parents had a choice of schools, we could use that energy to help sustain those choices and make more available."

Curriculum conflicts aren't easy for public schools to resolve. Many parents want different things for their children, and so any choice always upsets someone. And parents' concern over curriculum doesn't always mean they have the expertise to design one.

Still, in most school districts, parents aren't invited to get very involved in curriculum decisions. In Braunlich's own district, the school board recently voted not to even let parents review a family-life curriculum before it was final.

Typically, a few parents are invited to join school district curriculum advisory committees, but they are far outnumbered by teachers or other school-district appointees, he says.

And the parents invited to take part aren't usually the vocal critics of progressive education. "There's this echo-chamber effect," Braunlich said.

"You get the feeling as a parent that you can't know nearly as much as the education establishment," said Kelli Kreienkamp, a mother, licensed teacher and co-founder of the Verona Core Knowledge Charter School in Verona, Wis. "They'll listen to you, but that's about all."

On her school district's curriculum committee, there was just one parent and six district appointees.

Kreienkamp and several other parents decided to start Verona, which opened in the fall of 1996. It offers a mix of the Core Knowledge curriculum as well as Direct Instruction – an education model with a tightly scripted role for teachers that flies in the face of what the current school establishment feels is best.

The district where Kreienkamp's children were in school had set up a pilot program in Direct Instruction. But parents weren't allowed to choose whether their kids got to take part.

"My kids have one shot at getting a good education, and this is what I knew they needed," Kreienkamp said. "There isn't a private school in our area that does this."

Likewise, Marilyn Keller Rittmeyer and other parents started the Thomas Jefferson Charter School in Chicago this year. "We wanted a classical education, one that used time-tested texts and teaching methods," she said.

"We tried to get the existing system to provide that as an option, but they refused to do it."

Could greater school choice help bring an end to the curriculum wars? "The answer is yes," Braunlich said.

Added Kreienkamp: "We're never going to go back to the time when moms and dads baked cookies and raised money for the schools, but otherwise kept their noses out."

Akron Beacon Journal, December 12, 1999

CHARTER EXPERIMENT GOES AWRY

SCHOOLS FAIL TO DELIVER

EDUCATION, SAFETY LEFT BEHIND IN OHIO'S RUSH TO OPEN ACADEMIES

By Dennis J. Willard and Doug Oplinger, Beacon Journal staff writers

Ohio, already No. 1 in the '90s for putting public dollars into private schools and last in the nation for placing children in safe and sanitary buildings, is on course to earn a new distinction in the next decade.

The state is ready to rival Arizona, California, Florida and Michigan for funneling state and local tax dollars to a new class of schools-charter schools-that are public in some ways and private in others.

Two years ago, Ohio did not have a charter school law on the books. But state lawmakers, former Gov. George Voinovich and current Gov. Bob Taft have made up for lost time-paving the way for 48 charter schools to open statewide in just the past 15 months.

While making good on promises to provide parents with educational options, state leaders and lawmakers were busy making choices of their own.

They opted to bully charter laws onto the books. They granted the state unchallengeable authority to create charter schools in existing public school districts. And they denied local communities any say in the matter, not even allowing public hearings.

Now, less than five months into the second year-as charter schools move from concept to reality-serious questions and disturbing problems are starting to arise.

- Private, profit-minded companies, known as education management organizations, are making strong inroads into the state. In doing so, these EMOs are concentrating school ownership in the hands of a few and brushing aside the people who were to be given control of their local charter, or community, schools-parents, teachers and community members.
- The Ohio Board of Education, responsible for oversight, is rubber-stamping contracts as fast as it can without thoroughly reviewing the written proposals or hearing from a single charter school representative. One reason: Most board members say they have almost no authority to reject a proposal.
- Lawmakers did not fund an oversight office for charter schools until the program's second year and after more than 60 contracts had been approved and 15 schools had opened. The undermanned office is hard-pressed to complete routine checks for fire safety and criminal backgrounds, and is barely monitoring academic progress.
- Children are bearing the brunt of the charter school problems. The state has allowed charter schools to open without textbooks or indoor toilets. Students have attended class in unsafe buildings that lacked sprinklers or fire alarm systems. And local police in Columbus were called 12 times in two months to one charter school to investigate disturbances, including one case of sexual assault.
- Most charter schools are not models for reform. First-year test scores indicate students in charter schools are doing dramatically worse than public schoolchildren, and the new schools are not incubators for innovation as proponents promised they would be.
- Profits are being reaped, but there is no evidence that charter schools are reducing education costs or saving Ohio taxpayers money-despite lower pay for teachers and exemptions from 191 state mandates that hike the cost of education in public schools.

The result is that parents pick the school of choice for their children while Ohioans foot the bill. And despite the millions of taxpayer dollars pouring into charter schools annually, there appears to be little government regulation.

"I think it's a mistake to have the state charter these schools and turn them loose with little or no supervision," said John Gilligan, Ohio's governor from 1971-75 who was elected to the Cincinnati Board of Education in November.

While he believes some charter schools have been successful, others have been fiascoes, he said.

"In the meantime," he said, "we're going to experiment with our children's welfare."

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EMOS DOMINATE

At the dawn of this decade, charter schools didn't exist anywhere.

In 1991, Minnesota was the first state to pass a law permitting them. By this year, an estimated 350,000 children were enrolled in about 1,700 quasi-public schools in 36 states and the District of Columbia, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Ohio's entree, albeit belated, has been dramatic.

During the 1998-99 school year, 15 charter schools were up and running. An additional 33 charter schools opened this year. The state will spend more than $52 million to enroll about 10,400 students.

And it's just getting started. Taft and state lawmakers have made a substantial commitment and investment in charter schools, extending their reach to Ohio's 21 largest cities and poor-performing school districts. With that, the number of schools and enrollment is expected to double by next fall.

Charter schools were a simple concept. To break the public school mold and monopoly, a local building would be turned over to parents, teachers, educators and community members.

Former state Sen. Cooper Snyder, R-Hillsboro, an early sponsor, made it sound like local folks would run a school building the way parents organize a little league baseball team.

"A good education system is central to any community," Snyder said in 1995. "My proposal simply allows the community to make significant contributions to the process and, in the end, I think we'll see better schools as a result."

Although profit is not a dirty word to charter school backers, Snyder and other lawmakers never mentioned it. Nor did they talk about private companies coming in from all corners of the country to open schools.

Now education management organizations dominate the charter school movement. Ohio is already following other states that have EMOs, such as Michigan.

A study completed in October by three Michigan State University professors found 70 percent of the charter schools in that state were run by EMOs during the 1998-99 school year, up from 50 percent a year before.

"I think this was an unexpected development," said David Arsen, one of the MSU professors. "Is it a good or bad thing? We don't know. What we do know is this is a terrifically important development. It's quite possible that linking the profit motive to improvement will work. It's possible that the opposite is true," Arsen said.

In Ohio, EMOs run 16 of the state's 48 charter schools. Although they represent one-third of the charter schools, the EMOs control 45 percent of the state and local funds and enroll 46 percent of the students.

By far, Akron entrepreneur David Brennan's White Hat Management is Ohio's EMO leader.

White Hat runs 11 schools with 3,267 students and is projected to take in $16 million-or almost one of every three taxpayer-funded charter dollars-this year. By next fall, Brennan and White Hat could have more than 30 charter schools in Ohio.

By law, only nonprofit organizations, and not private for-profit companies, can start a charter school. But the nonprofits and EMOs work hand-in-hand, often so close it is difficult to determine which came first or if they truly are distinct entities.

For example, identical contracts for several White Hat Management-managed schools were submitted together to the state board although the schools are supposed to be run by independent governing authorities-the private equivalent of school boards.

These governing authority members, unlike public school board members, can have a financial interest in the schools, give contracts to friends and relatives without competitive bids, and are not required to undergo criminal background checks.

Those liberal doses of public funding with few strings attached make Ohio attractive to EMOs.

The state gives charter schools the same basic funding per pupil as the local public school district, but Taft and lawmakers upped the ante for the quasi-public schools this June with increased money for computers, all-day kindergarten, textbooks, aid to poor children, special education and startup funds.

Even charter school advocates are split on the issue of EMOs and the privatization of public education.

Brennan and other entrepreneurs say a market driven by parents will decide the fate of charter schools while others think charter schools should be limited to filling niches not addressed by local districts.

The Ohio Department of Education is struggling with this issue, largely because more than half of the 60 contracts proposed for next year are from EMOs or charter school developers already operating in the state.

But their internal debate may be wasted effort because a majority of the state Board of Education, empowered with creating charter schools, say they do not have the authority to reject a legal contract.

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MASTERS OF OVERSIGHT

To paraphrase Will Rogers, the state board has never met a charter school it doesn't like.

The board rarely questions individual contracts. It voted for 37 contracts with a single roll call on April 13.

State board members -- 11 of them elected and eight appointed-are responsible for approving 36 of the state's 48 open charter schools. The remaining charter schools are in the Toledo area, created by public agencies in Lucas County.

Jennifer Sheets, an elected member from Meigs County, said the state board has no discretion and must approve any contracts that meet standards established by state lawmakers.

The gray area, of course, is the standards.

The board relies on recommendations from state education department staff, who review the proposals, point out legal, academic and operational problems, and raise questions for the board to consider and discuss.

Some contracts, like those for the Ida B. Wells and Edge Academy charter schools in Akron, are thorough. Staff reviews indicate little or no problems with those contracts.

But they are not the norm. Most contract proposals are flagged by staff for numerous problems. Some contracts have as many as 20 areas marked "no," meaning they are not acceptable in those areas.

While Department of Education staff is expected to iron out the problems with the charter school, the state board has been more interested in getting schools open and approves almost all contracts on a conditional basis.

State board members, however, do not follow up on the outstanding conditions in the contracts, and the education department reviewers who originally noted the problems are not asked to sign off on any negotiated changes.

Diana Fessler, an elected board member from the Dayton area, has criticized the board for not doing homework or addressing important issues. She also could not get education department staffers to send her contracts to review and was not given access to the thousands of pages until shortly before the April 13 meeting.

"It would have been humanly impossible for someone to read and absorb," Fessler said.

Melanie Bates, an elected board member from Cincinnati, said she supports charter schools and voted to approve the 37 contracts. But some schools in that bunch should not open, she said.

"They are bundled. I think the full board should vote on these individually," Bates said.

One of the contracts approved was the Cleveland Alternative Learning Academy, run by a Maryland-based company that also opened a school in Dayton. Department staff reviewing the Cleveland contract cited 17 deficiencies on Feb. 23, noting the proposal appeared to have been completed in a rush.

Six weeks later, the deficiencies were never discussed as the state board approved the contract without mentioning the school.

In another possible problem, most charter school contracts do not list potential locations for school officials to check out before approving a binding contract. That may explain why no one from the state board or department inspected the Cleveland Alternative school before it opened in August.

But city fire inspectors eventually did. A month after classes began, fire inspectors forced the school to close because it did not have fire alarms or sprinkler systems. The state let the school move to a different building without a working alarm-a problem once again cited by city, not state, officials.

In October, staff from the Office of School Options-which oversees a majority of charter schools in Ohio-made site visits to the 36 schools approved by the state board. Ten charter schools were not in full compliance with fire inspections, 17 did not have completed occupancy permits, and nine schools were not in full compliance with health and safety inspections.

More than a month after opening, seven schools were not in full compliance for any of the three critical areas-occupancy, fire or safety and health. The schools are providing the state with weekly updates on their inspection status. But there was almost no progress four to six weeks later.

Only one school had secured an occupancy permit while none of the schools noted in the first visit had reached full compliance on fire, or health and safety inspections.

Steve Ramsey, assistant director of the Office of School Options, said the state board will continue to approve contracts that do not list a specific location, but operators must have a facility by June 15 beginning next year. All occupancy permits and fire, safety and health inspections must be completed before a school can open next year, Ramsey said.

Still, state board members appear to be looking no further than the last page of the contract summary for a recommendation. In doing so, they are not asking questions or discussing problems brought to their attention by the department.

And the board doesn't always follow recommendations.

When contracts for Cincinnati's Riverside Academy and Hope Academy Lincoln Park in Cleveland were approved in April, they came with this staff recommendation: The Brennan schools should be allowed to open only "upon satisfactory completion of the state auditor's report of the current Hope Academy charter schools for the 1998-99 school year."

But when the schools opened in September, State Auditor Jim Petro's office had not yet received financial data from the Hope schools. And the audit results won't be ready until next year.

Neither state board President Martha Wise nor state school Superintendent Susan Tave Zelman were aware of the decision to allow the schools to open-a decision made by education department staff without their bosses signing off.

There is one part of the contract that state board members have been sticklers for-a clause that clearly states they are not personally liable as individuals or as a state panel for any damages or personal lawsuits brought against the charter schools.

And state lawmakers, after being lobbied aggressively last spring, changed Ohio law to ensure charter schools could be sued, but the individuals operating them were not personally liable and would not lose their homes or possessions through a court action.

Wise, the state board president from Avon, defended the board and its actions thus far on charter schools. She noted that the board relied on the state education department to review and monitor the schools.

"We were trying to go as fast as possible and not be inhibitors for choice for parents and their children," she said. "The term would be due haste. We were working as fast as possible."

Ramsey said the state will "have egg on its face" at times as these schools start to open, but the setbacks are worth the effort to increase competition in the public school monopoly, provide choice to parents and reduce overall education costs.

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LITTLE, IF ANY, INNOVATION

Charter schools were supposed to spur healthy competition and innovation.

"Charter schools can make it really easy to innovate in the classroom," said former state Rep. Sally Perz, R-Toledo, an early sponsor.

To date, the state has no program designed to share innovations if there were any.

Many charter school operators rely on nationally developed, alternative education programs that many public schools would experiment with if money was available.

There are two Montessori charter schools in Ohio. At the Millennium School in Columbus, Jim Cowardin uses Direct Instruction. In Akron, 120 miles away, Susan and David Dudas bought the same program from McGraw Hill for their Edge Academy.

"Innovation does not equal success. It's results that count," Susan Dudas said.

The large EMOs often bring the same cookie-cutter approach to their schools that charter school supporters have argued are problems in public schools. After all, developing new educational approaches takes time and money.

Edison is one of the few EMOs that is credited with investing in research and development, but it still relies on Success For All, a widely used reading program.

David Brennan, who denounced the cookie-cutter approach used by public school "educrats" as chairman of Gov. George Voinovich's school choice commission in the early '90s, has opened two types of cookie-cutter schools.

His Hope Academies and Life Skills schools rely on the Josten computer-based education program, which is used throughout the nation. One of his schools may begin to use Direct Instruction.

Jim LaRiccia, principal of the largest charter school in Ohio-Brennan's Eagle Heights Academy in Youngstown-was asked to explain the difference in academic approaches between his school and the local public schools.

"There's a lot of hugs," LaRiccia said. "That breaks down a lot of walls."

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NO SAVINGS

Charter schools also are supposed to save money, but there is nothing in the law that requires them to do so.

In February 1997, the state's Legislative Service Commission prepared a 13-page memo that identifies 191 sections of Ohio law that charter schools are not required to follow. Public school administrators maintain they would spend less if they were given the same exemptions from mandates that charter schools enjoy.

While some laws pertain to bureaucracy and recordkeeping-a cost that cannot be ignored in public schools-other areas require the public schools to spend considerable amounts of money.

Public schools must continue to notify parents when students are absent and meet per-pupil ratios for librarians, guidance counselors, nurses and art, music and physical education teachers. Many charter schools offer these services part time or not at all.

In public schools, gifted children must be identified and provided special attention. Not so with charter schools.

LaRiccia, the Eagle Heights principal, said he doesn't test the school's 732 students to determine if any are gifted, and there are no special classes or pullout programs for the children.

That helps keep costs lower for the charter school.

Clint Satow, Ohio Community School Center assistant director, said charter schools already spend less per pupil than local public schools. While he is correct that public schools spend more, the differences can be accounted for by hundreds of dollars spent by public schools for school bus transportation and federal, vocational and gifted programs.

Some charter schools avail themselves of those services, which would push their per-pupil expenditures much closer to that of the public schools. The charter schools can also receive up to $150,000 over three years in federal and state start-up grants that public schools do not.

And Taft and state lawmakers this year made sure charter schools would receive the same amount of money per pupil or more than a local district in almost every state and federal funding area.

Ironically, due to the complexity of the state's funding system for public schools, charter schools are actually costing local property taxpayers more money for their local school system.

That's because the state guarantees 100 percent funding for each child enrolled in a charter school, but does not extend the same to the public school student.

Why? State funding increases are capped at 11.5 percent regardless of enrollment.

That means Cincinnati, the largest urban district affected by the cap, will lose $8 million in state aid this year. The cap forces the district to pay 100 percent of the funding for the local charter school students, including the state's share.

"The impact is there," said Richard Gardner, Cincinnati schools treasurer. "The state would say it is just a pass-through. The problem is that really doesn't happen. The cap kicks in. We don't get any more money because of the community schools."

Gardner said charter schools will cost his district $7 million this year, and a levy approved by local voters in November was needed to pay the bill.

The state is picking Cincinnati's and other urban district's pockets in another way. The state guaranteed to the 15 original charter schools that they would get as much special education money as last year-regardless of whether special ed students actually enrolled there.

Four schools in Toledo and two in Cincinnati opted to take the guarantee, which will cost the local districts $500,000 each.

But under the guarantee, if the child returns to Cincinnati, the money doesn't follow the student. It stays with the charter school.

For example, Harmony Community School in Cincinnati will receive nearly $485,000 more this year in guaranteed special ed money as a result. The money for the guarantee comes from Cincinnati. "I have to pay Harmony for not educating that student," Gardner said.

Those problems aside, charter schools appear to be here to stay. And each state is faced with designing its own laws and policies.

"The rules matter," MSU professor Arsen said. "You have to have rules, and you have to get the rules right."

In Ohio, charter schools are expected to keep opening at a quick pace. Millions of state tax dollars will continue flowing into them. And the state will be deducting dollars from local school districts that in effect will move local property taxes into private hands.

But the idea of the charter school has changed a great deal without much public debate.

Gone is the talk of communities controlling a local school building. More and more, charter schools are a privatization of public schools although supporters are reluctant to acknowledge this idea.

At a workshop held once a week by the education department to help people prepare proposals for charter schools, Dr. Patricia Hughes, a consultant hired by the state, was recently talking about the types of charter schools that have opened in Ohio.

Like most people at the statehouse, Hughes calls them "community schools."

She noted there was one type of community school that had not emerged as the state began working to open more schools in the third year of program.

"Right now, we don't have a neighborhood community school," Dr. Hughes said.

And she said it without a hint of irony.

The Chronicle of Higher Education, October 29, 1999

Colleges Experiment With Charter Schools

Institutions see the academies as sources of students and laboratories for research

By JULIANNE BASINGER

La Jolla, Cal.

The youngest students at the University of California at San Diego hope to be admitted there six years from now.

This year, their main worry is getting through middle school and the rigorous college-preparatory curriculum that the university has helped create for the charter school that opened on its campus this fall.

While dozens of colleges and universities across the United States have sponsored or formed partnerships with charter schools, the organizers of the San Diego school say theirs is the first to be run by a research university and housed on its campus, with the aim of helping low-income, minority students prepare for the institution's competitive admissions process.

The idea for the Preuss School sprang from the furor that followed the vote by the University of California System's Board of Regents in 1995 to ban the consideration of race in decisions on admissions, hiring, and contracting. California voters a year later had approved Proposition 209, which banned affirmative action in all state agencies.

The regents then encouraged the system's eight undergraduate campuses to work with middle and high schools in helping to prepare students for college, so that the universities' enrollments could remain racially and economically diverse. The university system now spends $140-million a year on such outreach efforts -- more than double what was spent before the ban.

But on the San Diego campus four years ago, a handful of faculty members and administrators doubted that those measures would suffice to expand the pool of minority applicants. "We came to the opinion that we have to be more invasive," says Cecil Lytle, a provost who led the push to create the charter school. "Until you affect what happens between 8 and 3 o'clock, you're just tinkering toward utopia."

The stakes of running a school to help prepare minority students for admission are high for the San Diego campus, says Henry M. Levin, who directs a new center at Columbia University's Teachers College that studies alternatives to traditional public education. "Symbolically, San Diego's charter school is important, because it shows the university is committed and willing to take some risks," he says. "But if they fail, they really have egg on their face. It's really putting your money where your mouth is."

The push to create a charter school at first drew opposition from faculty members, who worried that their research budgets would be cut to fuel the new endeavor. Some questioned whether educating schoolchildren was even the responsibility of a research university. Part of the controversy also stemmed from the fact that the school would be a charter school, a kind of public school that has generated fierce debates since the first one opened in Minnesota in 1992.

Thirty-six states and the District of Columbia now have laws allowing anyone -- including parents and business groups -- to apply to start a charter school. The charter is a contract between the aspiring founders and the state to establish a school, specify its programs, and outline how it will measure its success. Charter schools receive public education funds but are free of many of the state and district regulations that apply to regular public schools.

Such schools have opened in all but four of the states that allow them. More than 1,700 charter schools across the United States now enroll about 350,000 students, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

Charter-school proponents have said that creating them would spur changes in school districts by driving competition and innovation. But districts have worried about losing funds to charter schools.

They and other critics also have questioned the schools' accountability and have cited examples of some that exclude a diverse range of students or that fail to offer special education.

Most researchers and policy makers say it is too early to measure the charter schools' overall success. But that uncertainty has not stopped colleges from stepping up their involvement.

Seven states have laws that allow colleges or universities to grant charters, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Michigan's public universities have authorized the most schools by far. Some institutions have granted charters for and oversee dozens of schools because of the strong role given to universities in the state's law. But their role has led to controversy on their campuses and criticism of their performance as overseers.

Other states that allow universities to grant charters are Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. Florida allows state universities to establish schools in consultation with local school boards.

More than 50 colleges now have some other involvement in the schools, including teacher training and educational research. But few have taken on sole responsibility for running a school.

San Diego's new school is one of the most ambitious and comprehensive of such efforts. This fall, 150 students, in the sixth through eighth grades, enrolled. As they advance, the school plans to expand to include high-school grades, for an eventual enrollment of 700. The first class will graduate in 2004.

The students now attend classes in temporary facilities here, but the university has raised nearly $13-million in private donations to build a new school on its campus. Peter Preuss, a California regent, donated $5-million. The school, named in his honor, is scheduled to be completed by next fall.

Students will continue to use campus recreation centers and attend occasional classes taught by professors in their laboratories or classrooms. The children's uniforms -- khaki pants with maroon or navy polo shirts -- make them stand out all the more as they walk in groups across the campus.

The university chose to open a charter school, because it wanted to use public funds, and to innovate without district and state regulations. It also wanted to attract students whose families couldn't afford to pay private-school tuition, the school's organizers say.

To be admitted, students must come from families qualifying for the federal subsidy for free or reduced-price school lunches. And their parents cannot have graduated from a four-year college.

Doris Alvarez, the school's principal, says the university chose students who had scored in the middle 50 per cent on standardized tests, but had otherwise demonstrated strong academic potential. "We didn't get the top kids," she says. "We looked at the students who we thought that, given the right supports, could make it."

Applicants were required to submit essays and portfolios of their academic work, and their parents were asked to help their children succeed. The school held a lottery to select 150 students from among the 500 applicants. The result was a diverse group of students -- 54 per cent Hispanic, 24 per cent African American, 12 per cent Asian, and 10 per cent white.

Many of the students spend more than an hour on a bus every morning to reach the university's oceanfront campus in posh La Jolla. Most of the transportation costs are covered by state money that was set aside under a ruling in a San Diego desegregation lawsuit.

Patricia Edon, whose son, Dion, is an eighth-grader at the school, says the opportunity is worth the inconvenience. "He doesn't mind it," she says. "It's a chance to be in a university setting, and they have exposure to university facilities."

The school offers a single-track, college-prep curriculum, with longer class periods than in district schools, allowing more in-depth instruction. The school day and academic year also are longer. And all students take Spanish classes.

Most university faculty members now favor having the school on their campus. But when the proposal was presented to them two years ago, they voted it down. Mr. Lytle, the provost who had fostered the idea, resigned in protest.

"The school, as proposed, was too small and wouldn't have had any effect," says Georgios H. Anagnostopoulos, a philosophy professor who led the Academic Senate at the time. "And it had no research component that connected the school with the university."

Robert Dynes, the chancellor, was among those who perceived flaws in the initial proposal. But he felt public pressure to have a charter school on the university's campus -- from local citizens, members of the Board of Regents, and then-Gov. Pete Wilson. So Mr. Dynes appointed a group of faculty members to revise the proposal.

The revision passed the faculty's muster, and Mr. Lytle, who also is a concert pianist and a music professor, agreed to stay on as a provost. The new proposal had two key changes: It assured a financial "firewall" between the university and the school, so that no university funds could be siphoned away, and it called for creating a research center to coordinate all of the university's work with public schools, including the charter school.

That helped frame the charter school more as a research laboratory for testing educational innovation, says Hugh Mehan, a sociologist and director of the university's teacher-education program. Mr. Mehan was named to direct the new center, which will help to relay the results of what works at the charter school to the local public schools that have partnerships with the university.

Students at the Preuss School, meanwhile, will be doing some research of their own -- observing life at a university. "When they look out the window, they see 15,000 examples of what they should be doing," Mr. Lytle says.

HIGHER EDUCATION'S INVOLVEMENT IN CHARTER SCHOOLS

In the 32 states, plus the District of Columbia, that now have charter schools, at least 50 colleges have some official involvement in about 200 charter schools, out of a total of more than 1,700. Most of the institutions are in Michigan, where eight state universities and one community college have granted charters for 151 schools and are responsible for their oversight. Nationally, the degree of colleges' involvement varies widely, from approving the schools' creation and collaborating in partnerships to actually running the schools.
Some examples:

- California State University at Los Angeles since 1994 has run an elementary school, the Accelerated School, in the South-Central area of Los Angeles. The school, which enrolls minority and low-income children, is part of the Accelerated Schools Project founded by Henry M. Levin, an economist and education professor now at Columbia University's Teachers College. The project offers an accelerated, single-track curriculum for helping disadvantaged schoolchildren catch up and do grade-level work by the end of elementary school.
- The State University of New York this year created a Charter Schools Institute, to help carry out a new state law that gives the university's Board of Trustees the right to authorize and oversee charter schools, and to revoke their charters if they don't meet state requirements. The law, enacted last December, calls for SUNY to authorize the chartering of 50 schools. The trustees this summer approved three charter schools, which opened this fall. None of the schools are operated by colleges.
- The University of Southern Colorado in 1994 opened the Pueblo School for Arts and Sciences, which now enrolls about 380 students from kindergarten through high school. The high-school students attend classes in the library building on the university's campus, while students in the lower grades attend school downtown. Students in all grades are offered a single-track curriculum that weaves arts instruction with academic work.
- The University of South Florida last year opened a charter school that now enrolls about 140 students from kindergarten through third grade. The University of South Florida Charter School, which is located in a museum off the campus, accepts low-income students from the local county.
- Wayne State University in 1993 opened an experimental middle school, University Public School, for disadvantaged minority children. Professors in many disciplines helped design the school's curriculum, and faculty members work with teachers on pedagogy and academic issues. The school is located in a downtown-Detroit building owned by the university.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

School Choice

While many today tend to think of school choice as an issue belonging solely to conservatives, history shows that its roots are to be found on the political left. Peter Schrag points out in "The Voucher Seduction," published in the *American Prospect* in November, that "Thirty-plus years ago, school choice was almost entirely a cause of the left." And while its current advocates are primarily conservative, that's far from universal. Paul Peterson, a self-described liberal, is living proof that not every member of the left feels obliged to defend the education status quo. In his "A Liberal Case for Vouchers," published in the *New Republic*, Peterson dismisses the "creaming" argument that so many choice opponents make. Reviewing data from the Edgewood private voucher program in San Antonio, Texas, Peterson shows that participating private schools do not skim off the highest achieving students. (Edgewood's own analyses, we understand, show the same finding, but for some reason have not been made public.)

A different twist to the "creaming" argument appears in "In Michigan, School Choice Weeds out Costlier Students" by Tama Lewin writing for the *New York Times*. While students are not "weeded" by academic achievement level, the authors conclude that Michigan's charter schools are not taking their share of the students who cost the most to educate: disabled youngsters and high school students (who require labs, athletic equipment, etc.).

For those still unconvinced that sundry school choice reforms are here to stay, Thomas Toch's *Wall Street Journal* article, "Whittling Away the Public School Monopoly," shows just how deeply rooted the largest profit-seeking public school contractor has become: running 79 schools serving 38,000 students nationwide (and that was before a big new agreement was reached in Dallas). Christopher Whittle's November IPO for Edison Schools stocks soared at $760 million in November.

Lastly, Checker Finn's "The Marriage of Standards-based Reform and the Education Marketplace," which he presented at the recent National Education Summit, discusses how competition-based and standards-based reforms should not be viewed as competing agendas but rather as complementary movements. While each approach has its advantages and disadvantages, together they create a potent synergy of checks and balances that can help keep both movements on track towards dependable reform.

KLA

The American Prospect, November 23, 1999

THE VOUCHER SEDUCTION

BY
PETER SCHRAG

Late this summer, just as Texas Governor George W. Bush was beginning to convince a lot of people around the country that his state's public school reforms were lifting the test scores of even the poorest students, along came presidential candidate Bush bearing an altogether different message: when we fail, let them eat vouchers.

If he becomes president, Bush told a group of Latino business leaders in Los Angeles, he will take steps to transfer federal Title I money from consistently failing schools—$1,500 per child per year—and give it to parents to use in any tutoring program or in any alternative school, public or private, that the parents choose: "Whatever offers hope."

Maybe even Bush isn't convinced that Texas, which had been getting lots of adulatory media attention for its self-proclaimed high achievement standards and its tough school accountability program, is such a great reform model.

Bush's proposal is loaded with questions and unresolved problems. The $1,500, really a semivoucher, isn't nearly enough to cover tuition at most private schools or even at parochial schools. And in taking money from the public schools—money that's supposed to go to schools serving large numbers of low-income kids—Bush may leave the kids who remain in even worse shape. To compound the questions, if the money can be used in parochial schools, there are major unresolved church-state issues. If it cannot, there may be few accessible alternatives, especially in the inner cities, where most of the schools with low test scores—the schools that are generally defined as failing—are located.

And yet nobody should underestimate the political potential of Bush's proposal, and not only among Republicans and conservatives who, in recent years, have been the chief apostles of what they call choice. On the contrary, proposals like Bush's are pitched at a wholly different constituency—at moderates, at minorities, like the Latino business people before whom this proposal was first delivered, maybe even at liberals, and beyond them at the great American middle.

To be sure, the loudest voices for vouchers, an idea dreamed up by free market economist Milton Friedman some 40 years ago, are still the voices of conservatives and of the Republican Party generally: governors Jeb Bush in Florida, Tom Ridge in Pennsylvania, Robert Taft in Ohio, and Tommy Thompson in Wisconsin; the Christian Coalition; the right-wing Bradley and John M. Olin foundations; and an array of educationally minded conservatives, among them William Bennett, Lamar Alexander, Chester Finn, Jr., and Diane Ravitch, all of whom served in either the Reagan or Bush administration.

MINORITIES AND VOUCHERS

But for anyone who looks closer, the news comes from a very different place. In most surveys, the majority of Americans give their local schools high marks, and most appear to be willing to spend more money to improve them. But in the annual Gallup Poll for Phi Delta Kappa, the percentage of Americans that supports some form of voucher has grown from 24 percent in 1993 to 51 percent in 1998; among blacks it's 59 percent; among Latinos, 68 percent. And while a recent poll conducted by National Public Radio, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard shows Americans as ambivalent and "divided" on vouchers, with 42 percent in favor and 54 percent opposed, in a similar survey done for the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, which focuses on black issues, 43 percent of the general population supported vouchers, more than half the blacks supported a means-tested voucher—one that would go only to the children of moderate- and low-income parents. In the Northeast and Midwest, black support for vouchers was well over 60 percent. (In Philadelphia, according to a poll conducted in April 1999 by the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, 72 percent of blacks and 79 percent of Hispanics favored vouchers.) Among blacks between the ages of 26 and 35, support for vouchers went through the roof.

There are other signs:

- In Florida this spring, the Urban League of Greater Miami, breaking with the National Urban League, signed on to support Governor Jeb Bush's bill, now law, that establishes Florida's statewide voucher program, the first in the nation, which allows children in failing public schools to transfer either to another public school or to a private or parochial school with a $4,000 voucher. Support also came from black Democratic legislators like Beryl Roberts and Willie Logan and from Miami's African-American Council of Christian Clergy. "It was a natural for us," said T. Willard Fair, the president of the Urban League of Greater Miami.
- In New York, the privately financed Children's Scholarship Fund (CSF), one of some 30 such programs, which this year gave 40,000 private school scholarships to low-income kids in scores of cities, announced that it had 1.25 million applicants—nearly all children from poor and low-income families—even though its scholarships provide only part of the tuition and parents are expected to contribute some portion from their own resources. CSF is funded largely out of the deep pockets of New York investor Theodore Forstmann, Wal-Mart heir John Walton, and former Disney President Michael Ovitz, but its advisory board includes, among others, Southern Christian Leadership Conference President Martin Luther King III and former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell.
- In Texas, two years ago, the state board of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the nation's oldest Latino civil rights organization, came close to endorsing a state voucher plan before backing off in the face of protests from influential members.
- In Cleveland last summer, when a federal judge named Solomon Oliver, Jr., ruling that constitutional challenges based on church-state issues had a good chance of prevailing, temporarily blocked the city's voucher program, the poor and working-class parents who used the program saw the decision as a disaster for their children. Oliver quickly amended his ruling to allow those who had been in the program to remain in private schools for another semester or until the case was decided.
- In Milwaukee, with a school enrollment of roughly 110,000, where some 8,500 poor kids are now attending private schools under a state voucher plan, Howard Fuller, the city's former superintendent of schools, now a professor at Marquette University and director of its Institute for the Transformation of Learning, is talking about creating a national network of blacks that supports options to existing school structures—vouchers, charter schools, and other alternatives to the existing system—because "we have to change the face of school choice to make it clear that support is not just coming from whites or from conservatives." The list of potential members—former Atlanta Mayor and UN Ambassador Andrew Young; former Congressman Floyd Flake in New York; state representatives Polly Williams in Wisconsin and Dwight Evans in Pennsylvania; the black Baptist ministers of Detroit who recently formed a Partnership for Parental Choice; the predominantly Latino Parents for School Choice in San Antonio; Professor Michael Nettles at the University of Michigan; Cleveland City Councilmember Fannie Lewis—is long and getting longer.

More important, perhaps, is the shifting rationale that accompanies that growing minority support. Much of the campaign for "choice" has been driven by Christian conservatives in pursuit of private-school subsidies. But ever since vouchers and tuition tax credits resurfaced as a major issue in the Reagan era, the policy argument, reiterated by people like John Chubb and Terry Moe in their book *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, had largely rested on Friedman's original free market theory. School monopolies, they maintain, are like all cartels. They give clients no choice and producers no incentives to improve, and are thus subject to the same inertia, inefficiency, and arrogance as Soviet-style collective farms and steel plants. Choice, write Chubb and Moe, "*is* a panacea." (The fact that the teachers' unions have long been one of the Democrats' largest sources of funds has, of course, added passion to the Republicans' theory).

But every time open-ended, market-based vouchers have been proposed in the states in recent years, they've been defeated, either in the legislatures or, as in major initiative campaigns in Colorado and California, at the ballot box. Since there was no means test in those voucher plans—and, in order to accommodate the Christian right, there were few other restrictions—the biggest chunk of tax money would have been taken from the public schools and given, at least initially, to middle-class families who already had children in private schools. That made those proposals fat, easy targets for opponents to shoot apart.

The new rationale is principally an equity argument, and the policies that follow from it are more finely tuned: The rich have choices, first because they can pay private school tuition and, more importantly, because they can buy their way into the neighborhoods that have the good schools. Fairness demands that the poor, whose children are caught in failing schools, have the same opportunities. "You can't tie the passengers to the deck of the sinking ship," Howard Fuller says. "You have to give them a chance to get off."

The strongest version of that argument comes from John E. Coons, a retired Berkeley law professor, who has probably thought longer and harder about equity in school finance than anyone around. A Democrat and longtime voucher advocate, Coons contends that the left has completely lost its way on this issue. "Here is an educational system which prides itself on being 'public' but which provides access to the best schools only for the rich, meanwhile herding the workers and the poor into the state schools that operate in those neighborhoods where they can afford to live," he said in a recent speech. He continued:

> Where . . . were the Marxist theorists whose vocation it is (or at least was) to expose such nasty instruments of class warfare? For that matter, where were—and where are—those Democratic politicians who so constantly assure us of their deep concern for the not-so-rich? So far as I can tell, the Democrats (my own party) are either running these state schools that warehouse the poor or—with the help of the teachers' unions—are busy in the legislatures and Congress making sure that nothing in this system changes except its ever-expanding cost. The rich choose; the poor get conscripted.

Because that rationale becomes more credible if vouchers are not perceived as subsidies to the affluent (who already have choices), every politically viable tax-funded voucher plan now in operation—Milwaukee's, Cleveland's, Florida's—either has a means test or, in what amounts to almost the same thing, allows only students in failing schools (as in Florida) to get tax-supported funds to go to private schools. The money goes, at least initially, to minorities and the poor. For people like Jeb Bush—or George W.—that may simply be the best way to get to the full-blown voucher programs that the right seems, at least in the abstract, to be committed to. But it is nonetheless a major departure from a generation in which, to use Coons's words, "pro-choice rhetoric . . . featured a self-defeating emphasis on market theory." And it ought to be a wake-up call for the left.

VOUCHERS AND THE LEFT

For those who have been around long enough, the new territory may not be entirely unfamiliar. Thirty-plus years ago, school choice was almost entirely a cause of the left. In the heady days of the 1960s, radical reformers looked toward the open, child-centered schools that critics like Herb Kohl, Jules Henry, Edgar Friedenberg, Paul Goodman, and John Holt dreamed about. Implicitly, their argument had the advantage of celebrating American diversity and thus obviating our chronic doctrinal disputes about what schools should or shouldn't teach.

Updated, their analysis has just as much salience today. Children are all different and learn in different ways, so aren't parents best equipped to decide where their own children are most likely to thrive? In a field where experts can't agree—where there are endless debates between the advocates of structured, phonics-heavy curricula and whole-language programs, about teaching math facts and discovery learning, about testing and multiculturalism and multiple intelligences, about the virtues of unisex schools for girls, about prayer and religion, about sex education and classroom discussion of sexual preferences—a single model prescribed by the state will always be a set of unhappy compromises that offends the private beliefs of a lot of parents and thus undermines their authority as educators of their own children.

In the 1960s, egalitarians believed that sooner or later school integration would equalize resources and in this way bring quality education to all American children. Then, as now, educational pluralism had worrisome centrifugal implications: the common school, after all, was supposed to be one of our essential instruments of assimilation and citizenship. The radical reformers of the 1960s made a tactical mistake, seeing alternative schools largely as a social or pedagogic vehicle—a way to get away from the old-fashioned desks-screwed-to-the-floor schools they regarded as coercive instruments that thwarted children's natural growth and curiosity; they thought too little in economic terms. And while there was much talk about alternatives—even about competition for public schools—equity issues rarely came up.

This is where liberals like Coons came in. It was Coons and his colleague Stephen Sugarman who, in the late 1960s, developed the legal doctrine that supported the constitutional challenge to the inequities between rich and poor communities in California's property tax–based school funding system, a theory that has since been used successfully in many other states. They showed that even where poor communities burdened themselves with exorbitant property tax rates, they could not generate as much revenue per pupil as wealthy communities could with much less effort. And since schools were ultimately a state responsibility, the state was violating its own equal protection guarantees. When the California Supreme Court in its two *Serrano v. Priest* decisions (one in 1971, the other in 1976) upheld the constitutional challenge, the state became the equalizer, first by providing additional support to poor communities and imposing what were, in effect, revenue caps on affluent districts, and later through the fortuitous effects of Proposition 13, which in essence turned the property tax into a state tax.

But in a series of books and articles, Coons and Sugarman argued that that form of equalization, which still assigned each student to a particular school, was never an ideal remedy—that the natural corollary to *Serrano*-like cases was a system under which the money would go directly to parents, provided that, like means-tested college scholarships, its value was pegged to family income. In the 1960s, when there was serious talk about vouchers in connection with Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, school choice belonged to the left. In the 1960s, both the feds and the Ford Foundation funded experiments with alternative schools. In the early 1970s, Representative Leo Ryan, a liberal Democrat (who was later killed in the Jonestown Massacre), started to organize a drive to provide all California children with vouchers that they could use in either public or private schools.

While all that seemed to have ended with the ascendancy of free market politics in the late 1970s, when, in Coons's words, "it became fashionable to argue for the deregulation of schools as if they were functionally the equivalent of banks or airlines," things seem to be turning again. Where vouchers had been easily perceived as attacks on the poor, they are now, with the help of that growing number of urban black leaders and with the growing ability of conservatives like the brothers Bush to exploit the issue, being increasingly represented as an instrument to help the poor. "Proponents seem at last to be convinced," says Coons, "that—at this stage in history—popular acceptance requires that choice be seen to help those who need it most. In due course a universal system may follow, but it will be the poor—not the market itself—who shall lead us."

THE RISKS

The question is where. Is this the beginning of a slippery slope in which the poor are simply the poster children in a process that will gradually erode support for all public education? Will the real choice go to the private schools, which can, in one form or another, cream the best and leave the toughest cases—the costly special-ed kids, the slow learners, the discipline problems—to a public system that has to take all comers? For voucher advocates, Jeb Bush's Florida "opportunity scholarship" plan, which Coons helped design, provides at least a partial model. The vouchers, which are the equivalent of what the state would spend on the same child in a public school, go to children in failing schools and can only be used in other public schools or in private schools that accept them as full payment for tuition, thereby making certain that schools won't simply raise their charges in proportion. It also requires private schools to accept voucher students "at random without regard to the student's past academic history" and allows them to expel them only in accordance with their published disciplinary procedures. In addition, the schools may not discriminate on the basis of race, their teachers must meet minimum qualifications, their facilities have to comply with state health and safety codes, and they must provide a school profile that includes student performance.

But in Cleveland, which began its voucher experiment in 1996–97, a considerable share, though hardly all, of the first vouchers went to low-income kids who were already in private or parochial schools; additionally, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), among others, has charged that the Cleveland vouchers are soaking up state tax money that could have gone to the restoration of full-day kindergarten and other improvements of the public system. In Milwaukee, meanwhile, complaints have been filed by People for the American Way, which, next to the teachers' unions, has become the nation's leading opponent of vouchers, charging that schools violated the state's voucher law by trying to discourage some applicants or by telling parents their children would be required to participate in prayer and religion classes.

Which, in turn, raises other questions, particularly about the fate of the failing schools and the students that, for one reason or another, do not or cannot leave. Coons argues that in places like Milwaukee, it is often the marginal students, not the best, who seek the vouchers, but in general, as one survey puts it, it is "the most advantaged of the disadvantaged" who are most likely to seek out alternatives to the neighborhood school. Voucher advocates claim that their scholarships usually cost less than what the public schools would spend on the same children, thereby leaving more resources for the remaining pupils, but the accounting is dubious if the costs of social services and educating handicapped children are included. And however much voucher proponents argue that once there is demand, suppliers will appear to take even the most difficult students, the public schools will always be the default system for those who cannot—or will not—find another place. Nor is there certainty about the new suppliers. In Milwaukee, at least some of them appear to be inner-city churches for which the vouchers may be not only a way to help children but also a means of generating revenues for themselves. Where that's the case, the constitutional church-state issue will be all the more difficult.

A crucial question is whether children who take vouchers to parochial and private schools actually do better than comparable kids in public schools. As in a lot of other educational research, the samples tend to be small and the variables too numerous to be conclusive. These include students who change schools or drop out, the differing levels of motivation of students and parents, and the corresponding levels of discipline (including expulsion) that choice schools can exercise as well as the varying amounts of money spent. [See "Vouchers: The Evidence," opposite.]

But in this controversy, the philosophical—and the political—issue of choice may be far more important than any statistics on achievement. For many parents who opt out of inner-city public schools, safety and school discipline are a higher priority than academic programs, which is probably why, in places like Milwaukee, parents give their voucher schools high marks even when there is no demonstrable improvement in their children's test scores. Not surprisingly, people who have chosen their schools—by moving to the suburbs, by getting into selective or specialized urban schools, or by buying their way into the Daltons and the Deerfields—have a psychological stake in their choice and usually give those schools high marks.

Poor black children, however, have no such choice. In the words of Michael Nettles, a professor of education at the University of Michigan and executive director of the Frederick D. Patterson Research Institute, who has collected great volumes of data about the education of black children, "[T]he pool of talent is too thin to expect public schools that primarily serve African Americans to become quality schools anytime soon." (The same point was made recently by Arthur Levine, the president of Teachers College, a liberal and longtime opponent of vouchers and one of the most respected voices in American education, who announced that it was time for "a rescue operation aimed at reclaiming the lives of America's most disadvantaged children" that would "involve a limited voucher program focussing on poor, urban children attending the bottom 10 percent of our schools" and that could be used "at nonsectarian private schools or better public schools in the suburbs.") Such assertions grow not from theory but from desperation: who can in good conscience argue that the more able or motivated poor students have to serve as hostages in dangerous or failing schools to protect the less able or, worse, to serve the cause of some political abstraction?

What's almost certain is that the nation's intensifying concern about education—the great ed scare of the '90s—has intensified the voucher issue as well. In state after state—Texas, California, Virginia, Florida, North Carolina, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York—there's no end of debate about tougher standards, about the end of social promotion, about high-stakes testing, and about increased accountability for schools, teachers, and principals. And almost everywhere, states are allowing the creation of charter schools, schools that are, in varying degrees, free of education codes and downtown bureaucrats and thus (at least in theory) provide choice and alternatives within the public system.

VOUCHERS AND CHARTERS

The charters have functioned as a kind of controlled-burning alternative to the fire of vouchers. Yet ironically, the debate—and the facts—about charter schools has itself begun to mirror the controversy, pro and con, over vouchers. In 1998–99 there were 1,200 public charter schools around the country, up from two in 1992–93, and their numbers are certain to grow. In some states, they enroll a disproportionate number of minority children and offer all sorts of programs and themes: technology, math, the arts, school-to-work. Some focus on low-income or at-risk students. In all those respects, they reflect the diversity rationale of the radical reformers of the 1960s.

But for all their promise, and despite the fact that they are theoretically accountable to a local district or to the state, a growing number of charters have become indistinguishable from private or even quasi-religious schools that offer Bible reading, give equal time to creationism, and, in some cases, are staffed by people who have only the most perfunctory training. In Fremont, California, an Islamic charter school, which gets full state funding, offers its 74 students a morning of academic training each day that's provided largely by parents under the supervision of a "facilitator"; in the afternoon, students attend the Annoor Islamic Institute in the same classrooms. In Michigan, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, National Heritage Academies, sponsored by entrepreneur J.C. Huizenga but tax funded as public charters, tilt so heavily toward evangelical Christianity that they are drawing scores of students away from private religious schools. Elsewhere county school districts have awarded charters, and the tax money that comes with them, to Internet distance-learning "schools," whose students, most of them home schoolers, can be hundreds of miles away, and where no one is quite sure where all the money goes. The charters have also provided a major opening for the Edison Project and other for-profit education companies, which now operate about 10 percent of the nation's charter schools.

And often, of course, the charter alternative is not available at all. Charters, requiring a critical mass of organized support from parents and/or teachers, are often hard and time-consuming to set up, especially for poor working parents facing the rigid school bureaucracies and unions of the inner cities. Some demand significant parent involvement, and, despite laws in many states requiring that they enroll a student body representative of the community where they're located, some are subtly as selective as private schools. [See Richard Rothstein, "Charter Conundrum," *TAP,* July–August 1998.]

What's changed far too little, even after nearly two decades of reform, is the huge achievement gap between whites and Asians on the one hand and blacks and Latinos on the other and, more generally, between high-performing (largely suburban) schools and the low achievers in the cities and many rural areas. The most important thing the new reform-driven testing programs have done is to make those gaps all the more apparent.

Worse, despite all the talk of reform and accountability, and despite some marginal improvement in minority test scores, public systems have not yet been willing to take the costly and unsettling measures, including merit-based hiring and promotion, that would get them the experienced, committed teachers and the quality courses that they, of all schools, so desperately need. In California, which has launched a great barrage of reforms, the state is now publicly listing schools by deciles according to their scores on a standardized test, from those that are in the top 10 percent to those in the worst 10 percent. But only a small fraction of the worst schools will be eligible for even the paltry and underfunded shape-up program that the state has put in place. Which is to say that while 800 schools (of 8,000) will be listed as the worst, only about 100 of them will get any help.

There are ample reasons to worry about the centrifugal social and cultural effects of a tax-supported voucher system. But by now school integration is largely a dream of the past, particularly for the young urban blacks who favor vouchers so strongly, and as it fades so, unfortunately, does the power of the argument about the importance of the common school in forging communities and assimilating the young. The forces of ethnic particularism that have often been cheered on by the left—the Ebonics programs, the widespread disdain among many teachers for what they regard as the Eurocentric melting pot, the political correctness—as well as the unvarnished racism in school districts like Oakland. And the right's flirtation with school prayer and creationist curricula is as apparent in many of our public schools as it is anywhere else.

None of these is an argument for a Friedmanite system. But that's not where the debate is now focused. What's on the table is more subtle, nuanced, and morally complex. And it carries a lot more political firepower. "Some say it is unfair to hold disadvantaged children to rigorous standards," George W. Bush declared in Los Angeles. "I say it is discrimination to require anything less—the soft bigotry of low expectations." For more than a generation, those children have been stuck in those schools while the educational establishment and its political allies have dithered.

The new politics of vouchers rest increasingly on the simple question that follows that neglect: what is the state going to say to the parents of the children who are the conscripts in those officially identified awful schools? There are plenty of problems in even limited vouchers, but until that question is answered, people like George W. Bush will have an issue. If the left doesn't understand that, the right will drive educational reform on its own terms. ◆

The New Republic, October 4, 1999

New data counters old fears.

A Liberal Case for Vouchers

By PAUL E. PETERSON

PERHAPS YOU'RE FAMILIAR with the "skimming" argument against school vouchers. As this line of thinking goes, the parents most likely to opt for vouchers will be the ones who are already most involved with their children's education—which, on average, will mean the parents of the most motivated and gifted students. Once the best and the brightest flee to private schools, public schools will only get worse; this debilitating cycle will continue until the best students are skimmed off and the only kids left in public schools are those with the fewest skills and the least-involved parents—in other words, the students most in need of help. "Vouchers are like leeches," says North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt. "They drain the lifeblood—public support—from our schools." Bob Chase, president of the National Education Association, concurs: Establishing a system of vouchers, he says, would be like "bleeding a patient to death."

We liberals are sensitive to this argument because we know that needy students are now getting the short end of the educational stick. Yet, while liberals are right to be concerned about these students, new data from a privately financed voucher program in Texas suggest that we should give vouchers a second, more serious look. Far from aggravating income and racial disparities in education, vouchers may actually help to ameliorate them.

In April 1998, the Children's Educational Opportunity (CEO) Foundation offered vouchers to any low-income child in San Antonio's Edgewood school district. Almost all of the district's 13,490 students were eligible for the program, because Edgewood is among the poorest of the city's twelve school districts—more than 90 percent of its students are economically disadvantaged, and 93 percent are Latino. (Nonetheless, the district, which receives 90 percent of its funding from state and federal aid, spends more than $6,000 per pupil, which exceeds the state average.)

The vouchers were hardly paltry: Providing up to $3,600 a year for elementary school students and $4,000 a year for those in high school, they would cover tuition at most San Antonio private schools, which for voucher students averages less than $2,000 annually. And, once a child's family decided to use vouchers, the CEO Foundation promised to continue providing them until that child graduated from high school, as long as he or she still lived in Edgewood. In addition, students could use the vouchers anywhere in San Antonio, even in public schools outside Edgewood that were willing to accept them. In the program's first year (the 1998-1999 school year), approximately 800 Edgewood students made use of the vouchers.

The Texas Federation of Teachers howled that private schools would "cherry pick" the best students and predicted the program would "shorten the honor roll" in public schools. "Right now, I don't have the profile of every child," Edgewood School Superintendent Dolores Muñoz said on PBS's "News Hour with Jim Lehrer," "[but] I guarantee you that at least 80 percent will be the high-achieving students."

TO MAKE MATTERS worse, stories of private schools shutting out applicants quickly circulated. Edgewood's school board president, Manuel Garza, wrote in the *San Antonio Express News* that he had received a call from "a mother ... for help because their application to the [Horizon program] had been denied.... I asked why she was denied. The mother said she was a single mom, had two jobs, and was told she was unacceptable because she could not dedicate time for extracurricular requirements, like helping out with homework and fund-raising." In other words, not only were the voucher students an unusually strong group academically, but the private schools were then allegedly winnowing their ranks even further.

But data from a recently completed evaluation (funded by the Packard Foundation) that included results from tests of student achievement and questionnaires filled out by parents during testing sessions yields a more complicated, and more encouraging, picture. (Standard techniques were employed to ensure a representative sample, and Mathematica Policy Research, a well-respected evaluation firm with contracts with the Department of Education and other government agencies, collected the data.)

It's true that the private schools had only limited capacity, in part because the program was unveiled in April and went into effect the very next August. Yet there is little evidence that the schools were weeding out all but the best students. For example, on the math component of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, on which the national median score falls at the fiftieth percentile, the voucher students, upon arriving at their new schools, scored at the thirty-seventh percentile, while the students who stayed in public school scored at the thirty-fifth—a difference that is not statistically significant.

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In reading, voucher students scored at the thirty-fifth percentile, while public school students scored at the twenty-eighth. This difference is significant but is hardly the gaping disparity voucher opponents predicted. In addition, just 23 percent of the voucher students had been enrolled in programs for gifted students, while 29 percent of the students who stayed in public school were.

These results are consistent with analyses conducted by the research department at the Edgewood public schools, which compared the test scores of students who later accepted vouchers with the scores of those who remained behind. Never made public, perhaps because it directly contradicted the school superintendent's assertions, the research did not show a significant "skimming" effect. In the authors' technical language: "[F]ew statistically significant differences [in average test scores] are to be found between [the voucher] students ... and those not ... identified" as voucher students.

Apparently, families have many reasons for choosing private schools. They may be looking for better schools for children who are doing poorly just as often as they are looking for other schools for bright youngsters. But admission to private school is one thing; keeping one's place in school is another. Since private schools can suspend or expel students more easily than public schools can, critics say, they are able to weed out the worse students. Again, the numbers refute this seemingly logical argument. Suspension rates were equal for the voucher students and the Edgewood public school students—around five percent for both groups. And what about income? Average household income was nearly identical—right around $16,000. The students' ethnic background (96 percent Latino) and their levels of welfare dependency and residential stability were also extremely similar. Quite apart from suspensions, the voucher students were more likely to remain in the same school for the year and were just as likely to return to that school the next year.

This isn't to say that there were no distinctions whatsoever among the students. Eight percent of voucher students were enrolled in some sort of special education, while the figure for public school students was 16 percent. There were also some modest demographic differences between the two groups of parents. The average mother of a voucher student had completed twelve years of education, compared to eleven years for the average public school mother. Half of the voucher-student mothers worked full time, compared to just 37 percent of the mothers who kept their kids in public school. Only 22 percent of voucher-student mothers were on food stamps, but 33 percent of public school mothers were.

BUT THESE SMALL distinctions are hardly enough to justify the extreme resistance to vouchers. For one thing, those helped by vouchers were far from well-off—the parents reported making less than $16,000 a year! There are plenty of other government programs, from Pell Grants to the Earned Income Tax Credit, that predominantly benefit the working poor, and nobody (well, almost nobody) protests them on the grounds that they don't benefit people further down the economic ladder. Support for vouchers is particularly strong among minority families, especially those living in cities. According to a recent survey undertaken at Stanford University, 85 percent of the inner-city poor favor a voucher plan, compared with 59 percent of more advantaged parents who live in the suburbs. Asked if they "strongly" favor a voucher plan, 58 percent of poor urbanites agreed, compared to just one-third of upper-middle-class suburbanites.

More important, though, vouchers have the potential to improve socioeconomic and racial integration, as long as they are generous enough to cover most of the tuition and as long as schools are prohibited from racial or ethnic discrimination in admissions. Remember, our public school system is *already* plagued by vast inequalities. Because most school funding comes through local property taxes, disparities among affluent suburban schools and city or rural schools are legendary. The story on race is no better: Despite three decades of busing, public schools today are more segregated, not less. In 1997, 69 percent of African Americans attended schools composed predominantly of minority students, up from 64 percent in 1973. For Latinos, the increase is much steeper, from 57 percent to 75 percent over the past 25 years. Today, despite federal interventions ranging from Head Start to compensatory education, we have disturbingly large test-score gaps between cities and suburbs, as well as between blacks and whites. According to one 1994 survey, only 43 percent of urban fourth-graders read at a basic level, compared with 63 percent of students in nonurban areas.

PRIVATE SCHOOLS, ON the other hand, are already more racially integrated than public ones. University of Texas Professor Jay Greene estimates that private school classrooms are seven percentage points more integrated than public schools. Examining Department of Education data, he also found more interracial friendships in private schools than in public ones (as reported by students) as well as less interracial fighting (as reported by administrators, teachers, and students). And, sure enough, in all the voucher programs for which we have been able to obtain ethnic data, students were less likely—or at least no more likely—to be attending segregated schools than students remaining in public school. This isn't surprising, given that private schools can draw students from across school district boundaries, and religious schools provide a common tie that cuts across racial lines.

Oh, yes, and how about those voucher families in Edgewood—what do they think of their new schools? More than 60 percent say they are "very satisfied" with the schools' academic quality, compared to 35 percent of the Edgewood public school parents. Similar differences in satisfaction levels are reported by parents regarding school safety, school discipline, and quality of teaching.

There are, of course, many other arguments against voucher programs, from the church-and-state issue to questions about for-profit schools. I don't happen to buy those arguments, either, but I'm happy to continue letting pilot programs provide a testing ground. Given the potential of vouchers to achieve more racial and socioeconomic diversity in education—one of the great goals of education reformers since the 1960s—you'd think more liberals would be open to experimenting with them. ■

The New York Times, October 26, 1999

In Michigan, School Choice Weeds Out Costlier Students

By TAMAR LEWIN

A University of Michigan study of the state's school-choice programs found that the spread of charter schools and inter-district transfers had created new educational opportunities for many of the neediest families and serious problems for only a few of the state's school districts. But it said that most of the programs were designed to attract only the students who cost the least to educate.

Over the last five years, as school choice programs have grown, many experts worried that charters, publicly funded schools that are not required to follow teacher union or local school board rules; vouchers, public money that can be taken to any private school, and programs that allow students to transfer to neighboring school districts, would attract the brightest students and those with the most involved parents. The result would be that the neighborhood schools would be left with the least motivated, most difficult students.

That has not been the case in Michigan, the study found. But many of the choice programs are taking the students who comprise the cream of the crop financially.

"We didn't find the academic creaming so many people worried about early on," said David Arsen, one of the three University of Michigan professors who wrote the report. "What we found instead is creaming on the basis of cost. Charter schools generally are taking the students who are cheapest to educate, and leaving behind those who are more expensive."

In Michigan, the state pays schools the same amount, almost $6,000, for each student enrolled. But because younger students are cheaper to educate than teen-agers who need laboratories, athletic equipment, extensive libraries and specialized teachers, most of those who have opened charter schools have chosen to open elementary schools.

The study also found that three-quarters of the charter schools offered no special education services, and even the few that did enroll special-needs students provided them with fewer and less costly services than nearby public schools.

The report points out that when charters enroll low-cost students and exclude high-cost students, they increase the average costs for public school districts that must still provide the more expensive services.

Last year, 3 percent of Michigan's students used school-choice programs, with 34,000 attending one of the state's 138 charter schools, and another 15,000 attending a school outside their home district. This year, some 50,000 children may be in charter schools, giving Michigan the third-largest charter population, after Arizona and California.

About half the school districts in Michigan now accept out-of-district student transfers, but many of the most affluent, fastest-growing districts do not.

"We've gone past the time when we can put the genie back in the bottle," said Gary Sykes, another of the study's authors. "This is here to stay. It's time to shift the attention from the debate about whether choice is good or bad to figuring out what mechanisms work."

The laws governing school choice vary enormously by state. "Our basic finding is that the rules matter," said David Plank, the third author. "Different rules create different incentives and different outcomes."

For example, in Michigan, where charters must make their admissions choices by lottery, most charters are in urban districts and enroll more poor and minority students than neighboring districts.

But in California, where charters are allowed to select their students and require parents to contribute resources, most charters are in suburbs or small towns, and enroll fewer poor and minority students than neighboring school districts.

The Wall Street Journal, November 15, 1999

Whittling Away the Public School Monopoly

Manager's Journal

By Thomas Toch

Edison Schools Inc., a company that has run public schools for profit since 1995, became a $760 million business last Thursday when its stock began trading on the Nasdaq exchange. Its initial public offering marks the return of company founder and chief executive Christopher Whittle, the flamboyant former owner of Esquire magazine and Channel One, whose high-profile publishing and marketing company, Whittle Communications, crashed and burned in the mid-1990s.

More importantly, Edison's successful IPO reflects the momentum behind a market-based movement that is changing the very nature of public education. With 79 schools and 38,000 students, Edison is merely the largest of many new providers of public education that are now vying with traditional public schools for students. Churches, YMCAs, universities, at least two dozen for-profit companies and many other types of organizations are operating publicly funded charter schools and, in Edison's case, traditional public schools under contract to local school boards.

The company knew from the outset that it would have to attract students away from conventional public schools. So it created a school design with attractive features such as home computers linked to school-based networks, and it lengthened both the school day and the school year so as to give students the equivalent of four extra years of instruction.

The company delivers its upscale school design not to rich suburban kids but primarily to disadvantaged urban students–kids conventional public schools haven't educated very well. Nearly half of Edison's students are black, and 60% are from impoverished families. The average Edison student comes to the company's school scoring at the 30th percentile on standardized tests. Symbolizing Edison's devotion to the poor, Mr. Whittle is planning to move its headquarters from midtown Manhattan to Harlem.

Edison has proved that the market forces are just as likely to spur innovation in public education as in other sectors. With its survival as a business tied directly to its performance in the classroom, Edison has come up with several ingenious solutions to pedagogical problems.

When the company opened its first middle schools three years ago, it found that its reading curriculum was far too advanced for its many students who could barely read. So the company hired the creators of Wilson Reading, a highly regarded adult literacy program, to adapt the program for preteens. As a way of shrinking staff expenses and enabling outstanding teachers to reach more students, Edison this summer entered a partnership with APEX, a company launched by Microsoft cofounder Paul Allen, to make Advanced Placement courses available to Edison high schools via the Internet.

Edison tracks student achievement and school performance to a degree unprecedented in public education. Every student's progress in basic subjects is measured monthly, and the results are delivered to the company's headquarters. Edison surveys parent, teacher and student satisfaction in every school annually. Edison principals are awarded performance-based bonuses of up to about 20% of their salaries. And the company swiftly fires principals and teachers who don't perform.

Have such steps produced better-educated students? In a handful of scientific studies comparing Edison students' classroom performance over several years against that of students with similar backgrounds, Edison students have registered greater gains. And on the 300 or so state and national tests students have taken in different Edison schools, their passing rates have risen or their scores have ratcheted up faster than expected about 75% of the time. Student attendance is generally high in Edison's schools, and dropout rates are low.

Critics argue that for-profit companies aren't necessary to introduce such reforms and that the money Edison makes in profit should be returned to students. But it's clear that outside catalysts are necessary to bring about real change. In Toledo, Ohio, facing the prospect of Edison opening a local charter school, the local teachers union joined forces with the school system to reconstitute a traditional public school to look a lot like an Edison school. They lengthened the school day and school year and brought in the same highly regarded reading curriculum that Edison uses. They abandoned seniority-based hiring in order to ensure that they got the best possible teachers.

Edison hasn't been successful everywhere. Several of its schools have foundered, and last spring it temporarily suspended two struggling high schools. Some Edison schools have inadequately served special-education students. Many of Edison's teachers have failed to use its expensive technology effectively in their classrooms. And most of the new Edison schools that opened this year lacked books and supplies (some even lacked desks) because of purchasing blunders. In response, the company sacked its entire purchasing staff.

Nor has Edison yet turned a profit; it lost $27.6 million last year. Losses have led to cost-cutting moves. The company has trimmed back expensive features of its school design—cutting the length of its typical school year from 210 days to 200 (the public school average is 180) and beginning its home-computer program in third grade rather than in kindergarten. And Edison cannot profitably operate schools in much of the South, the Rocky Mountain states and California because of low state education spending. As a result the company has turned to philanthropy; it opened eight schools in California with the help of millions of dollars donated by Don and Doris Fisher, founders of the Gap.

Edison's model is not excessively expensive. The company received an average of $5,555 a student last year, less than the $6,392 that the average public school spent per pupil. The company is counting on such things as cheaper computers and economies of scale to put the company into the black. If the company grew to about 700 schools, it would have the revenues of a Fortune 500 company.

Whatever Edison's flaws, the mostly disadvantaged kids on Edison's campuses are by and large in more attractive, safer schools with higher standards, more resources and a greater sense of purpose than the traditional public schools most would otherwise attend. And that's not because Edison employs a bunch of educational magicians. It's because the company has to compete for every student it enrolls.

Mr. Toch is a guest scholar at the Brookings Institution.

1999 National Education Summit

The Marriage of Standards-based Reform and the Education Marketplace

by Chester E. Finn, Jr.

Standards-based education reform and competition-based reform enhance each other; indeed, they are mutually reinforcing. Change-minded governors, business leaders and education movers and shakers should recognize their synergy and embrace them both.

A Little History

When the governors and President Bush met in Charlottesville, competition-based reform was barely a blip on the radar screen. What was fresh and exciting - and nervy and controversial - in 1989 was the setting of national goals and the intensification of a nationwide push toward standards-based reform.

A country that had long operated as if the way to get better education results was to pump up school inputs, resources and services now found itself grappling with a very different idea: The way to get better results is to stipulate the results you want, make sure you have sound means of gauging progress toward them, create incentives (and disincentives) tied to such progress and "align" the pieces of the delivery system such that all move harmoniously toward the same ends.

A decade later, such systemic strategies remain the primary focus of most reform efforts at the state and national levels and in a number of localities. But they've turned out to be very hard to install, and they don't always work as intended. They consume vast political energy and run into dogged resistance, vested interests and deep-seated inertia. Back in 1989 - and even, I think, at the 1996 Summit - we didn't fully fathom the arduousness of moving from broad goals to specific, high-quality content standards, demanding performance standards, workable assessments and forceful high-stakes accountability systems. Today, only a few states have all these elements in place and can see them paying off to a degree that justifies the effort. Indeed, some jurisdictions are already backpedaling because, to put it simply, they're finding that the short-term political cost of serious standards-based reform rivals the long-term gain.

Why so painful? Because individuals and institutions don't like to change their accustomed behavior, particularly when changing means working harder and being held accountable for their results in ways they previously were not. And because public-sector monopolies are possibly the most change-averse institutions that ever existed. The upshot: The systemic approach alone has not yet generated a reliable, cost-effective and politically feasible strategy for sufficiently altering individual and organizational behavior to yield stronger pupil achievement.

The Systemic Approach Is Not Enough

We're coming to understand that education results change only when people's actions change. Johnny will learn more when he studies more and harder. But what will induce him to do that? What will cause his teachers, principal and the other adults involved in his education to alter their accustomed ways so as to yield better-than-accustomed results?

Systemic reformers still assume that standards-based schemes, properly executed, will trigger the necessary behavioral changes. The oomph in this strategy comes from the top downward and the center outward. It relies on authority for its enforcement. It is, in fact, much like any other government compliance system. Why it seems so novel is that we are unaccustomed to enforcing results-based behavior in K-12 education.

From where I sit, the systemic approach takes an awful lot of doing, and it isn't yet paying off in many places. Perhaps the most important reason is that the "consequences" don't really touch many of the players. Kids still get into college somewhere, even if they do poorly on the state tests. Few employers pay much attention to their transcripts or scores. As for teachers and principals, not many have their jobs or salaries on the line. And the public school system still enjoys almost the same near-monopoly that it always has. However poorly it educates its students, it still holds onto them and the moneys that come with them.

The Marketplace Alternative

Ten years later, another approach to education change also has begun to figure seriously in U.S. school reform efforts: a marketplace strategy in which the impetus comes mostly from the bottom up and the outside in. It's a very American approach - messy, entrepreneurial and opportunistic. Its underlying theory is much the same as that of capitalism itself: Competition leads to efficiency, quality and consumer satisfaction, while forcing ineffective providers either to alter their ways or go out of business. Change within a system comes from competition outside that system. Competition thus benefits not only the children who exercise choice but also the schools and school systems that they forsake. Precisely because the latter institutions lose their monopoly, they must begin to worry about attracting and satisfying their customers with quality, effectiveness and efficiency. Those customers - parents and students - now have options.

Though this looks new in K-12 education, it's been the norm for several decades in higher education and for longer than that in the private K-12 sector.

This is no place for a full discussion of the theory and practice of school choice. I would just make three points about the "marketplace" approach.

Varied Options, Combined Approaches

First, the marketplace approach comes in many flavors, from bland, vanilla kinds (such as public school open enrollment and magnet schools) to Rocky Road offerings (such as home-schooling, vouchers and tax credits). In between, one finds many variants, including today's most prominent variant, charter schools. What all versions have in common is acceptance of the fact that schools can and should be different, not identical, and that the ability to choose among them should extend to everyone, not just to wealthy families.

Second, there is no state today where a pure marketplace approach is the only education reform strategy under way. While most states have some school choice - and a few have quite a lot of it - in every instance it coexists with other reform schemes, most commonly with some version of "systemic reform."

Third, most available evidence suggests that choice programs are benefiting the children they serve. (Research is not yet conclusive with respect to pupil achievement because the choice programs are new and mostly small, in no small part because opponents have staunchly resisted the well-designed, large-scale experiments that would yield more definitive data.)

Visible Benefits and Systemwide Change

We also are starting to see evidence that the marketplace approach, once it grows large enough to be felt by the regular public school system, is beginning to influence it. When a significant number of alternative education providers arise, the system starts to compete with them. The superintendent asks: What must I do to get my students back - or keep them from leaving in the first place? If the charter people are offering an after-school program, why can't we offer that within our system? You say that parents want school uniforms? A back-to-basics curriculum? A Montessori school? A gifted-and-talented program? Why should they have to turn to charters and private schools? Why can't we offer those options? School systems that think this way find themselves, often for the first time, becoming consumer-minded and market-conscious. This is triggering real change in how they organize themselves and what they provide. As choice strategies spread, more such system change will follow.

In a handful of cases, the school system has even embraced the charter strategy for its own purposes, using it to create unconventional schools or programs that would be difficult or impossible to establish under conventional laws, regulations and contract provisions. In a couple of communities, the school system has, in effect, chartered itself, thereby gaining a high degree of regulatory freedom for all its schools. In others, the system has used the charter law to establish R&D schools, develop demonstration programs or experiments, or circumvent rigid certification requirements and collective bargaining constraints. (School systems also are using outsourcing and privatization opportunities to deliver new education options and remake failed schools.)

The system's response to charter schools, open enrollment plans, vouchers and other forms of school choice shows how the marketplace strategy leads to behavioral change - not because someone farther up the regulatory hierarchy dictates it, holds out rewards or threatens sanctions. No, it happens because the marketplace signals that change must occur for the survival of the system itself.

Compare and Contrast

Today, the "systemic" approach to education reform and the marketplace approach are both vigorous, sometimes in the same places, sometimes with different degrees of energy in different places.

The Ability to Improve Education
Each approach has its pluses. "Systemic" reform is clear about its desired results, comprehensive in its ambitions and orderly in its strategies. It exploits the rationalism of the central planner, the know-how of the expert and the talents of the professional. If it works as intended, it will lift all boats, leaving no one out. Although it alters routines, procedures and incentives, it disrupts no basic structures.

"Market-style" reform is dynamic, fluid and adaptive. It eschews standardization and believes that opportunity comes from choices rather than compliance. It trusts consumers more than producers, laymen more than experts and entrepreneurs more than planners. It reallocates power. It is quick to create, overhaul and terminate institutions. It has little tolerance for approaches that don't meet the pragmatic test of whether anyone wants them or not. It also opens the door for more people and organizations to engage themselves in the education enterprise, and thus appeals to many teachers and other school innovators.

The Difficulties of Effecting Change
Each has its minuses, too. The systemic strategy is vulnerable to election returns, personnel changes and holy wars over what's important for children to learn. Its legitimacy hinges on hard-to-achieve consensus about standards - many states have gone to great pains to develop thoroughly mediocre standards - and hard-to-perfect assessment systems. It partakes of a one-size-fits-all view of curriculum, which may not work in the pluralistic society Americans now inhabit.

The systemic strategy also is affected by politics. Its impact hinges on hard-to-implement accountability schemes because its energy comes from the top - and those at the top are subject to political control and therefore vulnerable to stakeholder influence. Such political considerations never really go away, which means that actual behavior-changing rewards and punishments for individuals and institutions are slow in coming. That's why we see so few examples of top-down accountability systems taking bold action to, say, close down a failing school. Disastrous schools seem to remain on probation for years with nothing really happening to change them. *Education Week's 1999 Quality Counts* reported that while 16 states have the authority to reconstitute failing schools, only three have actually exercised that option.

The marketplace strategy is also hard to execute. It relies on good consumer information about school effectiveness (data that often aren't available), and it presumes the existence of large numbers of fussy, motivated parents who prize academic quality above all else (parents we don't always have). Real dynamism hinges on a "supply response," i.e., the willingness of education entrepreneurs to create, replicate and expand institutions, so the political environment must be stable enough and funding must be generous enough to make this possible. We rarely see such circumstances.

School options do some people more good than others. (They are, for example, less viable in rural communities and less meaningful for seriously dysfunctional families.) There are sundry political, statutory and constitutional barriers to the provision of a full range of choices (though here, the politics, once worked through, may ease, as the marketplace takes over). And there remains the risk of "balkanization" if what is taught in one school bears scant relationship to what children learn in another, or if schools begin to market themselves to people solely on grounds of ethnic or social identity (or simple convenience and glitzy amenities) rather than academic effectiveness.

Each approach thus has important virtues and liabilities. Neither is complete unto itself. As Denis Doyle has written, "Without choice, the standards debate is almost certain to become an empty exercise. There is simply no reason to believe that every school in every district in every state will hold itself to the same high standards; it can't be done politically, it can't be done logistically. Only highly centralized school systems even attempt such an approach. American commitment to local control rules out any centralized solution."

Plenty in Common
It turns out that the two approaches have more in common than their most zealous fans and critics like to admit. Standards-based reform treats the individual school as the key accountability unit, insists on school-level report cards, welcomes the publication of school-by-school test scores and employs other market-oriented strategies. Many "systemic" reformers also talk of empowering individual schools to achieve the desired results in the manner they

deem best, casting off needless rules and regulations that tend to standardize school practices.

Though not all choice advocates want government agencies setting standards or imposing tests, virtually all agree that well-informed consumers and comparable data about schools are necessary for the marketplace to thrive. Most acknowledge that schools must make their standards and results public. Most welcome external audits of school performance. Most leave room for government licensing, lottery-style admissions, civil rights enforcement and other regulatory strategies meant to protect equitable access for children. Most hope to create ways of channeling private investment toward public ends, such as the birth of new school-provider organizations that then operate as publicly accountable charter and contract schools. Though defenders of the status quo tend to depict proposals like charters, outsourcing and vouchers as greedy market solutions, that's not really what they are. They are more like new ways of doing the public's business, often with the help of private dollars and entrepreneurial energy.

It's hard to visualize a standards-based system working well without opportunities for the creation of new schools and the entry of new providers. Unless states are prepared to create new education options for children whose schools are not teaching them satisfactorily, standards-based reform could turn out to be an elaborate ruse that puts some pressure on schools but doesn't continue on to its own logical conclusion: If existing schools cannot or will not meet the standards, but children nonetheless need to be educated to the standards, then we need new and different schools.

But the converse is true, too. New schools need to be held to, and measured against, the same standards as the schools they replace and those they compete with. Properly crafted charter laws, for example, insist that the charter school show its progress against the state standards as well as satisfactory performance on the state test in order to get its charter renewed. (The school also may have other goals and indicators of its own choosing.)

Thus we shouldn't be surprised to see a hybrid strategy appearing in many places. That's certainly what Florida's new voucher law offers: The state keeps its promise to children and families by ensuring that kids do not remain trapped in schools that repeatedly fail to meet the state's own standards. Choice offers the means of keeping that promise. In the two "poster states" most often touted by systemic reformers, Texas and North Carolina, we also see vibrant charter programs (and, at least in Texas, other new-provider and choice schemes) operating in tandem with statewide standards, tests and top-down accountability structures. In Chicago, we see the system using charters to create new options for families in low-income neighborhoods burdened by low-performing schools. In Arizona, Massachusetts, Michigan, Pennsylvania and other jurisdictions too numerous to mention, we see both strategies operating at once. What's most interesting is how often nowadays we see them buttressing each other, compensating for each other's weaknesses, maximizing each other's virtues.

Moving Forward

Standards-based reform must modify behavior to succeed, yet it has grave trouble doing this exclusively through top-down rewards and sanctions. It needs to leverage change in institutions and individuals, yet finds them resistant to regulatory manipulation. Choice lubricates the system, makes movement possible and alters behavior without command-and-control tactics. Indeed, it alters behavior in the most natural possible way: by allowing alternatives and options. It doesn't eliminate standards or exempt people (or schools) from assessments. In effect, it adds another set of consequences. Think of choice in this context as an additional accountability strategy.

Yet the marketplace doesn't work well unless each school's performance is transparent, consumers have ample information about that performance vis-à-vis some kind of standards or benchmarks external to the school itself, someone outside the school is auditing that performance and somebody is ensuring that basic rules of fairness are followed so that children don't fall through the cracks. Systemic reform can furnish those essential elements of a well-functioning marketplace. It also can supply enough commonality of content across otherwise variegated schools to mitigate the "balkanization" problem. This means, in the words of a colleague, that "standards make choice safe for liberals." (One might add that choice also can make standards acceptable to conservatives.)

Charter schools again illustrate this synergy. They are accountable in two directions at once:

- **"upward"** to the public entity that issued the charter, which monitors their performance in relation to their singular promises as well as the standards of the state in which they're located, and which can shut them down if they fail to deliver the results they pledged; and

- **"downward"** to their clients and customers, all of whom are there by choice and all of whom may leave if they're not satisfied with the school's performance.

These are two forms of serious accountability - each placing the school's very existence on the line - in contrast to a regular public education system that commonly has neither, at least not in any functional sense.

Policymakers should view charter schools as an accountability prototype. Once it becomes clear that these schools exist under a contractual relationship with the state and can be shut down for nonperformance, we face an important question: Why should any school have a permanent lease on institutional life - and a permanent claim on tax dollars - if it is unable to produce satisfactory results for its pupils? Unless the state is prepared to apply an eternal double standard to its schools - holding some accountable for student achievement, while continually funding others that produce few or no results - the charter school prototype will point the way toward more serious accountability policies for K-12 education in general.

Think of blending standards-based reform and marketplace strategies as the surest way of producing within elementary and secondary education the "tight/loose" management structure that has worked for so many modern organizations: *tight* with respect to the results that must be produced and the ways these will be measured and reported (these elements being provided by the standards-based approach) but *loose* as to the means by which those results are produced, with tolerance for diversity and plenty of competition among production units (with these components furnished by the marketplace approach).

Combining today's two premier strategies of education change can produce more than either alone is apt to deliver, perhaps even more than the sum of their parts. This is also a pretty good way to strike a balance between uniformity and diversity - and between accountability and freedom - in a country that palpably wants all those things (and more) from its K-12 education system.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Standards and Accountability

As standards gain traction, problems and issues arise. The basic theory is familiar: set a high standard, install suitable tests, rewards and sanctions, and those who are measured will achieve more. But a number of states and communities are finding this easier said than done. In some places, students, teachers, and principals are meeting the standards because the standards are coming (down) to them. Jacques Steinberg describes this phenomenon in his *New York Times* article, "Academic Standards Eased as Fear of Failure Spreads." Charles Sykes then takes us to a deeper explanation, saying that everyone loves standards until they affect their own kids. A lot of parents don't want to hear that their little Johnny is less than perfect, Sykes notes in his *New York Times* op-ed, "Soccer Moms vs. Standardized Tests."

Writing in the *New York Times*, Anemona Hartocollis presents a different explanation for the non-attainment of standards. In "Ignoring the State Curriculum Caused Poor Scores," she indicates that students would be more apt to do well on state tests if their schools taught the content that those tests are designed to appraise. This comes as E.D. Hirsch praises outgoing Chancellor Rudy Crew's solitary curriculum for the state of New York. Read his appraisal, "One Curriculum For New York," published in the *New York Times*.

Meanwhile, a duo of Colorado school districts offer their own solution to the problem of low test scores: They will guarantee that their students make the grade provided that local taxpayers agree to provide more funding for them to do so. Read about this proposed quid-pro-quo in June Kronholz's piece from the *Wall Street Journal*, "Colorado School Districts Promise to Make the Grade."

Stanford professor Michael Kirst adds another dimension to the standards discussion. In his *National Crosstalk* piece, "A Babel of Standards," he finds a basic disconnect between high school preparation and the skills needed for college success.

In "Discrepancies Mar New School Gauge," from the *Washington Post*, Brigid Schulte shows that alternative methods for assessing schools can yield contradictory results. In Montgomery County, Maryland, new superintendent Jerry Weast has shaken things up by rating schools according to their degree of improvement rather than their absolute test scores. Many schools whose scores had long been high but static were quite upset.

Some people argue that it will do more harm than good to hold students accountable. In "Taking a Chance on Promotion," Debbi Wilgoren of the *Washington Post* tells the story of a student who was promoted in order to salvage her self-esteem but then given crucial remedial help so she could keep up with her classmates. The outcome…well, you'll just have to keep reading. Yet not all teachers are inclined to provide extra help; instead, some just cheat on students' behalf. E.J. Dionne, in his *Washington Post* opinion piece, "When Teachers Cheat," analyzes the recent case of a pack of teachers caught cheating for their students in New York and what it bodes for the standards movement.

Finally, Richard Rothstein, with whom we often disagree, is perceptive on this issue. In his *New York Times* article, "One Standard Doesn't Fit All," he states that you can't have a single standard that both sets a minimum expectation that all students must attain *and* establishes a lofty goal toward which they are meant to strive.

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The New York Times, December 3, 1999

Academic Standards Eased As a Fear of Failure Spreads

By JACQUES STEINBERG

The tough academic standards that state policy makers and others have invoked over the last three years as they imposed high-stakes tests on students are beginning to yield uncomfortable results: too few of the students are making the new grades, many are at risk of dropping out or being held back, their parents are venting frustration and school systems are beginning to pull back.

The states are acknowledging that, often because of financial concerns, they have not put in place the training programs for teachers, the extra help for students and the other support necessary to meet suddenly accelerated standards. In some instances, they have also suggested that they may have expected too much, too soon.

The state that is believed to have retrenched the furthest is Wisconsin, which acceded to parent demands last summer that it withdraw a test that every student would have had to pass to graduate from high school. But at least a half dozen other states and large districts are also moving to soften the expectations for students that have been drafted, in every state except Iowa, in at least some form and in some grades.

After it was announced last week that only 1 out of 10 Arizona sophomores had passed a new state math test last spring, the Arizona Board of Education agreed to the loud demands of parents at a meeting in January that it reconsider the test.

In October, the Virginia Board of Education agreed in principle to revise a policy it had only recently adopted that obligated schools, as a condition of accreditation, to show that 70 percent of students were meeting state testing requirements by 2007. After only 7 percent of Virginia schools met that standard last spring, in the second year of the test, the board has proposed waiving some sanctions against those schools that have failed but are able to demonstrate progress.

Massachusetts, having established a sweeping new curriculum with rigorous new tests, set the passing grade low last month — in a range described as at the bottom of "needs improvement" and just above "failing" — when it calibrated an exam required for high school graduation.

New York, too, has set a low passing grade — 55 out of 100 — on its college-preparatory Regents English exam, now required of all high school graduates, and teachers here have objected that grading guidelines for the tests are overly generous.

And Los Angeles school administrators, who calculated that they would have had to hold back nearly 1 of every 2 students if they went through with a plan to end automatic promotions in all grades, said this week that they were now considering whether to erect such gates in just two grades.

"The standards movement has moved from the early stages to the stage where the consequences are on the verge, if you will, of being tested," said Jerome T. Murphy, dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "People are backpedaling."

"I'm of the view," Mr. Murphy added, "that backpedaling is smart when you are heading over a cliff."

The idea of setting high standards, and writing tests to ensure that they are met, has been advanced by a broad chorus of policy makers and educators, including Mr. Murphy. The advocates believe such policies offer insurance that students in rich and poor schools alike will cover the same ground, as well as a tonic to a nation that has grown weary of its children's academic shortcomings.

But in moving rapidly to put such expectations on the books — of the 49 states that have standards, no two exactly the same, all but 14 wrote them in the last three years — the states have been criticized by teachers, parents and students for being slow to put in place, and pay for, the proper support structures to help them meet the high goals.

Many teachers report being unprepared, and at times confused, by what the states have written. They maintain that more money needs to be spent on professional development and smaller class sizes. Students complain that they are being tested on material to which they have not yet been exposed. And parents lament that their children are being penalized for the failings of adults.

"Teachers and principals simply do not know how to do what they are expected to do with the new standards," Richard F. Elmore, a professor at the Harvard School of Education, said this week in Washington, at a conference marking the 10th anniversary of the first national education summit meeting. "Until you can walk into the average classroom in the average school and find the content being taught in a way that would help the average student meet the standard, it is not fair to penalize the students."

'Backpedaling is smart when you are heading over a cliff.'

That the politicians are tuning in, and responding, to such rumblings was obvious in October, when many of the 24 governors who gathered at an education summit meeting in Palisades, N.Y., conceded that they had been taken aback by the demoralizing effects of their new policies.

In urging them to stay the course, the organizer of the meeting, Louis V. Gerstner, chairman of the International Business Machines Corporation, asserted: "We understand the pain. And we're going to have to deal with it. But we're not going to deal with it by backing off."

At the end of the two-day gathering, the governors were among the signers of a mass pledge that, if carried out, would give students and teachers the very underpinning they have requested, including help for struggling students before they are held back or denied diplomas.

But the political ramifications of widespread student failures are already beginning to be felt, and many of the states, and school systems, are reassessing policies that have hinged on the belief that all students should be able to vault over high bars — and not merely clear minimum hurdles.

Indeed, some experts believe that the states have routinely confused minimal standards with lofty goals, and while preparing students for the former they are demanding that they meet the latter. Others maintain that it remains to be seen whether schools, working on their own, can succeed in lifting all students to meet rigorous academic standards, in light of outside factors like family and neighborhood.

The implementation of the new policies has led to some awkward, and confused, moments.

The five-member school board in San Diego, for example, voted unanimously in February 1998 to begin holding back third graders who could not read at grade level and eighth graders who had failed at least one course, beginning in June 1999.

But by June, the board had yet to agree on a way to measure grade level, so it let all the third graders pass. Of the 1,400 eighth graders who had failed at least one course, 700 were still deemed to be failing at the end of summer school, said John de Beck, a board member and former high school teacher.

And yet, in what Mr. de Beck labels an "educational disaster," half of those students were retained and half were passed on to ninth grade — with no ready explanation from administrators. Now the board is reexamining the entire policy, with some members hungry to repeal it.

In Massachusetts, Anna Ward, a parent of two daughters in the Cambridge public schools, said she had yet to distill the rationale of the state board of education in setting the passing grades on the new state tests, including the passing grade on the high school exit exam: 220, on a test with a minimum score of 200 and a maximum of 280.

"My initial reaction was that they're just playing around with these numbers and they're not addressing the educational problems," said Ms. Ward, an administrative assistant in the mathematics department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. "It feels arbitrary to me. I don't think that this test is going to indicate whether my child has what it takes to be a graduate of high school."

While Massachusetts was seen by some as easing the burden on students it had once threatened to punish, Todd Bankofier, a member of the Arizona Board of Education, said he was undaunted by the results of his state's new math test, which 89 percent of all sophomores failed.

"When we fired this missile, we knew we had to guide it," Mr. Bankofier said of the new testing program. "It's going to take some left turns and some right turns, but it would be wrong to turn it completely back."

The New York Times, December 6, 1999

Soccer Moms vs. Standardized Tests

By Charles J. Sykes

MILWAUKEE

After decades of endless gold stars, happy faces and inflated grades, American parents apparently were not ready for a reality check about how much our schools are really teaching our children.

Across the country, new, higher academic standards that states adopted in a spirit of educational reform are being dumbed down, and supposedly rigorous graduation tests are being diluted or dropped, as evidence mounts that too many students will fall short of the higher expectations.

It is not surprising that more rigorous state standards have come under fire from the usual opposition coalition of civil rights groups, progressive educators and teacher unions. What is striking though, is the opposition from soccer moms.

In Wisconsin, where legislators backed off plans to require a high school graduation test, most of the opposition to the exam came not from troubled urban schools, but from affluent suburbs. A group calling itself Advocates for Education and based in the Milwaukee suburb of Whitefish Bay, insisted, "High-stakes testing will be detrimental to education and unfair to children." Suburban critics in many parts of the state fretted about the pressure that tests would place on children. After suburban parents lobbied parent-teacher organizations, the State Legislature voted to scrap the graduation test before a single student had taken it.

For some parents, the word 'fail' can't apply to their kids.

In New York and Massachusetts, officials yielded to pressure to set absurdly low passing grades for their new tests, while in Virginia and Arizona, state boards of education are already backing away from tests that proved to be too tough for even the so-called better schools. In Virginia, only 7 percent of schools met new achievement standards, and in Arizona, 9 out of 10 sophomores failed a new math test.

For much of this century, the educational establishment has behaved as if it were addicted to bad ideas, indulging its own wishful and romantic thinking even in the face of mounting evidence of failure. The new tests were supposed to counteract the trendy experimentation, watered-down curriculums and questionable teaching methods by introducing both accountability and consequences for failure.

But for decades, the schools had been allowed to obscure the fact that many children were not mastering basic subjects. The constant positive reinforcement of unrealistic grading and easy tests was meant not only for the children, whose self-esteem remained strong in the face of shaky math and reading abilities, but for their parents, as well.

For many of these parents, the new tests were a very rude shock. Accustomed to thinking of educational difficulties as somebody else's problem, they and their school districts suddenly faced the possibility of failure.

As reformers have belatedly discovered, they badly underestimated the extent to which parents as well as teachers and bureaucrats had a vested interest in believing that whatever else might be wrong with American education, their own children were above average. Support for high standards came with an unspoken caveat: they were quite all right when they were applied to someone else's school and someone else's child.

So instead of sounding an alarm about the need to change the way we teach our children, one state after another is fudging the test. And a remarkable number of parents have gone along with the move to ratchet down the standards, expectations and consequences.

Reforming the schools sounded like a good idea until it hit home. ☐

Charles J. Sykes is the author of "Dumbing Down Our Kids."

***The New York Times*, November 9, 1999**

Ignoring State Curriculum Caused Poor Scores

By ANEMONA HARTOCOLLIS

When New York State announced the poor results of its tough new fourth- and eighth-grade math tests on Friday, the dismay was not confined, as so often in the past, to New York City and other big cities. Many parents, teachers and administrators in the state's wealthiest areas — where people buy expensive homes thinking that they are also buying outstanding public schools — were in shock, too.

For decades, residents there had been lulled into a sense of complacency because the state had used a minimum competency test to measure student performance, a test on which children in places like Westchester County and Long Island routinely scored near 100 percent — so high that there was no statistical room for improvement.

That complacency was rudely shattered last week when one out of five children in even the most exclusive suburbs, like Rye, Great Neck and Mamaroneck, failed to meet state standards in eighth-grade math.

What went wrong? parents throughout the state wondered. Was the test asking the wrong questions, or were schools failing to teach what children should know?

From Syracuse to New York City, educators said yesterday that they believed the test itself was not to blame. State officials said that the new test — far from expecting children to demonstrate an unprecedented level of knowledge — was actually based on elements of the state curriculum that have been in place for more than 30 years.

The problem, they said was that — especially in the middle grades — those standards had never before been tested. And since no one was watching, officials said, teachers felt free to ignore the state curriculum, relying on inadequate textbooks or their own judgment.

"I wasn't surprised," the state education commissioner, Richard Mills, who pushed the State Board of Regents to adopt the new tests, said yesterday.

Judith Rizzo, deputy chancellor for instruction in New York City, where 77 percent of eighth graders failed to meet the new math standards, agreed.

"I know everybody wants to blame the test," Ms. Rizzo said. "But you can't. There's nothing wrong with this test. It's that it measures standards that, across the state, people have not been preparing kids for. And it's that simple."

Stung as they were by the dismal results, some education officials said the test revealed problems that pervade eighth-grade math classes across the country, and not just in New York, including shortages of qualified teachers, early tracking of students and a focus on rote learning rather than understanding.

The lack of testing in middle school also explains why fourth graders did better than eighth graders on the new test, said Lynn Richbart, a mathematics specialist for the state Education Department. Fifty-four percent of eighth graders failed outside New York City, but just 23 percent of fourth graders did (it was 50 percent in New York City).

Since 1965, Mr. Richbart said, the state has tested heavily in third grade through sixth grade, forcing teachers to focus on state standards. But this is the first year that eighth graders have been required to take math tests, he said.

The new tests are in many ways a reaction to the freedom, experimentation and idiosyncratic curriculums that came to characterize American schools in the last generation, educators said. In New York City, curricular unorthodoxy was heightened by decentralization.

The tests, given during the last school year, grew out of a broader reexamination of how students across the nation were being taught math. In 1989, state officials said, the National Council of Mathematics recommended new math standards.

Scores on a math test stun districts both rich and poor.

In 1993, New York State, influenced by the council, toughened its own math standards. Five years later, seeing a need to make those standards more concrete, the state put out a new math curriculum for kindergarten through eighth grade. These were the standards used for the latest tests.

Now that the results are out, the next step, Mr. Mills said, is to use those results as a force to improve the curriculum and teaching.

"This is not a pop quiz," Mr. Mills, the education commissioner, said. "We had standards, curriculum, test results. If you don't like the results, what do you do? First of all, you look at what is actually taught in everv school in every classroom."

Echoing Mr. Mills, several math teachers said yesterday that the concepts used in the eighth-grade test are not particularly difficult and that the problem is they have too often been taught by rote, or not at all.

Many elementary school teachers, they said, suffer from a kind of math phobia, often brought on by lack of training, that limits them to teaching simple calculation and formulas, without giving students a richer understanding of the abstract concepts the calculations are based on.

Martin Davis, a math teacher in New York City, said that he began the last school year by trying to teach algebra to his ninth graders at Bayard Rustin High School for Humanities in Manhattan. As they asked questions, he said, it became clear that many of them did not know how to multiply two double-digit numbers, and he had to start over.

"Theoretical math, in essence, is really play, it's games," said Mr. Davis, who has since moved to a different school. "If kids don't start playing those games and thinking about them, and thinking about strategies, they miss out on a great opportunity to succeed in seventh- or eighth-grade math."

Dr. Rizzo said she expected scores to improve when the test was given a second time this year. But even if they do not, she said, the city will use the next scores as one factor in determining whether students move to the next grade.

"If the kids don't have the skills and they're not going to succeed at the next grade level, what's the point?" she said.

Like Dr. Rizzo, officials in District 2, one of the city's most successful districts, which runs from TriBeCa to the Upper East Side, believe that teacher training is the key to success on the new test. For the last three years, the district has assigned master teachers to work all year long in classrooms with individual teachers and with groups of teachers.

"You can't teach what you don't know," said Lucy West, director of mathematics for District 2. Fifty-two percent of the district's eighth graders met the math standards, more than double the citywide average.

In a suburban setting, Sherry King, superintendent of Mamaroneck schools, said she chalked up the first year's performance to unfamiliarity with the test and to the problems of children who are in special education or who do not speak English fluently.

The tests, Dr. King said, are just one measure of what schools are doing right. "They don't pay any attention to our rich focus on the arts, to what we're doing in creating community, in keeping our schools from becoming like Columbine; to the growing issues of economic and social diversity."

Mr. Mills said he had little patience with the argument that disadvantaged children could not be held to the same standards as more affluent ones who came to school with more learning from home. In the job market, he said, they would all face the same demands.

"People don't say before we have this job interview, would you please tell me did you come from a good school or a bad school, an advantaged community or a disadvantaged community?" he said.

Susan S. Lewen, the mother of two children in Mamaroneck schools, said that while she took the test scores "with a grain of salt," she could not help but use them to compare schools.

KEEPING TRACK

Solving Problems

Students taking the eighth-grade math tests were asked questions like those in the examples below. They are asked to analyze mathematical situations, construct generalizations that describe patterns and develop an understanding of real-world number usage.

NUMBER AND NUMERATION Steven's dad is researching an old family recipe. He has found that members of the family do not agree on the amount of flour needed for the recipe. The following is a list of measurements he received from different people for the number of cups of flour needed.

$$1\frac{1}{4} \qquad 1\frac{1}{3} \qquad 1.5 \qquad \frac{5}{3} \qquad 1\frac{1}{8}$$

He wants to use the largest amount of flour. Which measurement above should he use?

ANSWER $\frac{5}{3}$ *or an equivalent expression of this number, such as* $1\frac{2}{3}$ *or* 1.66

MATHEMATICAL REASONING Dina wrote the following facts about three different numbers: a, b, and c.

Fact 1: $a \cdot c = a$ **Fact 2:** $a + b = a$ **Fact 3:** $abc = 1$

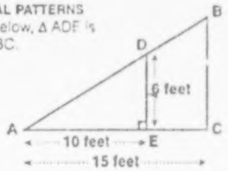
If Fact 1 and Fact 2 are true, explain why Fact 3 is not true.

ANSWER Fact 3 cannot be true because Fact 2 requires $b = 0$. *This makes* $abc = 0$ *instead of 1.*

What are the values of each of the variables in Fact 1 and Fact 2?

ANSWER a = *any real number,* $b = 0$, $c = 1$.

MATHEMATICAL PATTERNS In the figure below, Δ ADE is similar to Δ ABC.



What is the length in feet of $\overline{BC}$?

ANSWER $\frac{10}{6} = \frac{15}{x} \qquad x = 6 \times 15 \div 10 \qquad x = 9$ *feet*

(Any proportion which reduces to $10x = 90$ *or* $x = 9$ *is correct.)*

What is the length in feet of $\overline{AB}$?

ANSWER

$$15^2 + 9^2 = (AB)^2 \qquad \sqrt{306} = AB$$
$$225 + 81 = (AB)^2 \qquad 17.5 \text{ feet} = AB$$
$$306 = (AB)^2$$

Source: New York State Education Department

The New York Times

Her son, Michael, now in the fourth grade, is being taught much more sophisticated math than her daughter, now in seventh grade, was taught just three years ago, she said. Michael has become skilled at writing his own mathematical story problems, long the bane of schoolchildren everywhere. He keeps a journal of his thoughts and ideas for English and a similar journal for math.

The schools are teaching to the test, Mrs. Lewen admitted, but to her surprise, she doesn't object. "I thought I might feel badly about it, but I don't," Mrs. Lewen said. "I think to some extent, this test does reflect best practice in the classroom."

The Wall Street Journal, October 29, 1999

Colorado School Districts Promise to Make the Grade

By JUNE KRONHOLZ
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

You get a guarantee from your auto mechanic. Why not from your public schools?

That, anyway, is the thinking of two Colorado school districts. They are asking voters to give them more money in ballot measures on Tuesday and are promising to raise student performance in return.

"We're saying, 'Look, we'll be accountable,' " says Robert Moore, chief financial officer of the 31,000-student Colorado Springs district. It is promising that 15% more children will be reading at grade level in two years or the district will forego millions of dollars in future funding.

In a similar measure, the 80,000-student Jefferson County district is promising a 25% improvement on reading and math scores in two years, if voters agree to a $25 million increase in yearly operating funds. "It's a performance guarantee," says Alvin Meiklejohn, a member of the committee promoting the ballot measure.

With public dismay mounting over the schools, and voters increasingly hostile to spending increases linked to their property taxes, Colorado's ballot measures are the most extreme attempts at holding schools accountable for their spending. But they aren't the only ones. At least 40 states now issue report cards on their districts and schools, some of them listing average teacher salaries and the amount spent on instruction compared with sports.

Florida Grading

Increasingly, states also are ranking their schools against one another as a way to hold them accountable for what their students do. Florida this year began giving its schools letter grades from A to F. Students in a school that receives an F two years out of four will be eligible for vouchers to attend private school—and as many as 65,000 children in 80 schools may be eligible for next year, researchers say.

Ballot measures now routinely tell voters how new school funds will be spent: Colorado Springs is saying it will hire 240 more teachers and offer tutoring to problem readers, among other things. "Before the 1980s, you could just ask for more money," says Michael Kirst, a professor of education at Stanford University. But as student performance stagnates or even falls, voters have become distrustful of school authorities. To pass a school-tax increase now, he says, "you have to have a reform package—describe it as raising achievement."

Meanwhile, to hold their universities accountable, 13 states base funding at least in part on an array of performance indicators including graduation rates, pass rates for students taking the bar and other professional exams, and even the faculty's success in attracting research grants. Earlier this month, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, which oversees 28 colleges and universities, announced that three-quarters of any new funding it gets from the state will be awarded to schools based on 30 performance indicators.

State spending accounts for only 14% of state-university budgets in Colorado, and the commission is asking for a modest $35 million increase—about $26 million of which would be given out based on performance. Still, says Jeanne Adkins, the commission's director of policy planning, "funding does drive change."

Tax Curb

That certainly is the message that ballot promoters in Colorado Springs and Jefferson County are trying to send. Colorado's Taxpayer's Bill of Rights, a voter initiative that passed in 1993, prevents any tax increase that doesn't have voter approval. That means that when property values rise after Colorado's every-other-year reassessments, tax rates must fall so that tax bills never increase.

The state government has committed to topping off school district budgets to take account of enrollment growth and inflation. But because it is constrained by the same tax limits, it has funded inflation only once in the last decade. Rudy Andras, a municipal-finance analyst for Dain Rauscher, an investment bank, and adviser to Jefferson County, says the district's funding is up 31% since 1989, to $4,774 a student, but inflation is up 42% in the county in the same decade.

To get around the curb set by the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights, Jefferson County and Colorado Springs are following other districts around the state in asking voters to pass a freeze on the property tax rate.

Guaranteeing Better Test Scores

How the proposed Jefferson County, Colo., tax increase for education would work:

1999-2000 school year: Children in grades 3,4,5,7 and 8 take state exams in reading, writing, math and science. District gets $25 million increase in its $455 million budget

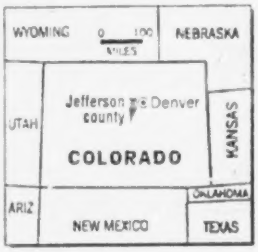
2000-2001: Children take tests again that are compared to the baseline year. District gets the $25 million increase, the same funding as the previous year.

2001-2002: If scores improve 7.5% (as an example, if 57% of children are rated proficient or advanced on the four tests, compared with 53% a year earlier), the district gets $31 million

2002-2003: If scores improve by 15% over the baseline, to 61% proficient or advanced, the District gets $37 million

2003-2004: If scores improve by 25% over the baseline, to 66% proficient or advanced, the District gets $45 million.

2004-2005: Increase is capped at $45 million.



Source: Quality Education Drive, a Jefferson County ballot supporters coalition

That means the tax rates wouldn't be lowered when assessments rise—and the school districts would get the additional money. Colorado Springs, with a $165 million budget, is asking for a permanent freeze that would generate an additional $11 million a year beginning in 2000. Jefferson County, with a $455 million budget, is asking for a five-year freeze that would add $25 million a year. For the owners of a $180,000 home, the average in Jefferson County, the measure would raise school taxes to $900 a year, a $90 increase.

Unlike other districts asking for freezes, though, Jefferson County and Colorado Springs are promising improved performance. In Colorado Springs, 52% of seventh graders now are either proficient or advanced readers based on Colorado's statewide test. In Golden, which includes Columbine High School, the scene of last April's gun rampage, it's 61%.

If the two districts meet their performance targets, they will receive revenue increases from future reassessments, too, for an expected $29 million a year in Colorado Springs seven years from now, and $45 million in Jefferson County three years from now. If the schools don't meet their targets, they would get increases from only the first reassessment, and the tax rate would begin to fall again after that. "We live in a fiscally conservative community," says Kenneth Burnley, superintendent of Colorado Springs. "We have to show them the beef."

That's possible now because technology can track students' weekly reading or math gains, pointing out problems that can be quickly attacked with tutoring. "We're at the point where we can start quantifying" performance gains, says Mr. Andras. "For the first time, we can answer the question: Will money do any good?"

Douglas Bruce, who wrote the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights and is leading opposition to the ballot measure in Colorado Springs, insists it won't—or anyway, shouldn't. If student performance improves with more money, he says, it shows that the schools "are holding back now and so we would be rewarding people for doing less than their best." If performance doesn't improve, it shows "they're already doing their best and money isn't going to do anything," he adds.

Even supporters of the two ballot measures concede they face a tough fight. Teachers unions, real-estate agents and most businesses support it. But Colorado Springs voters approved a $100 million bond issue three years ago, promising to improve scores within five years in return for construction funds and new technology. The district doesn't face a penalty if it doesn't meet that promise, and with two years to go, it hasn't. Jefferson County, meanwhile, hasn't passed a property-tax increase for its schools since 1982.

"There's a substantial amount of negativism about the public schools," says Mr. Meiklejohn, "but a great deal of curiosity about the guarantee."

National Crosstalk, Fall 1999

A Babel of Standards

Students face a confusing array of tests and assessments

By Michael W. Kirst

EDUCATION STANDARDS have swept across the U.S., engulfing almost every state. Forty-six states have created K-12 academic content standards in most academic subjects, and all but Iowa and Nebraska have statewide K-12 student achievement tests.

At the state level, there is progress toward focusing on, and clarifying: 1) what students must be able to know and to do in the K-12 grades, and 2) how to align standards, assessments, textbook selection, and accountability measures at the K-12 level. A gaping hole in this reform strategy, however, is the lack of coherence in content and assessment standards between higher education institutions and systems and K-12 systems.

Unless we close this standards gap and align K-16 policies, students and secondary schools will continue to receive a confusing array of signals and will not be able to prepare adequately for higher education. The current scene is a Babel of standards, rather than a coherent strategy.

The roots of this problem go very deep in the history of American education standards policy. The U.S. created two separate mass education systems (K-12 and universities and colleges) that rarely collaborated to establish consistent standards. Often, economically disadvantaged students are overrepresented in non-honors courses and do not receive college admissions-related information from either school or non-school sources. Improving the policy signaling process, and the alignment of K-16 policies, will benefit all students.

Not all countries have a history of such a disconnect between education systems. In England, for example, senior secondary education exams and standards were designed solely to prepare and sort out students for university entrance. Now that England sends about the same percentage to universities as the U.S., this system uses two exams that are designed to align K-16 standards.

We rely on the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) and ACT (American College Testing) to provide some uniformity, but neither of these assessments is aligned with the recent up-surge in K-12 standards. The situation is even more disjointed concerning higher education placement tests. In the southeast United States, for example, there are nearly 125 combinations of 75 different placement tests devised by universities with scant regard to secondary school standards. The only nationally aligned K-16 standards effort is the Advanced Placement program — a stalactite that extends from universities, utilizing a common content syllabus and exam.

The result of this confusion is that K-12 and university entrance and placement assessments usually utilize different formats, emphasize different content, and take different amounts of time to complete.

For example, Kentucky's K-12 assessment relies heavily on writing examples, but the SAT and ACT assess writing through multiple choice.

Massachusetts' state K-12 assessment contains performance items that are dissimilar to the closed-end multiple choice format of SAT and ACT. California's newly-augmented STAR test includes math that is considerably more advanced and difficult than SAT and ACT. Texas' K-12 assessment (TAAS), however, does not include sufficient algebra or geometry so it is not as challenging as the SAT.

Some state K-12 assessments permit students to use calculators, but the university placement exams do not. Texas has a statewide postsecondary placement test (TASP), but many Texas universities also use their own placement exams. Interviews with students demonstrate that they have no idea about placement standards. Many state assessments do not go beyond tenth grade and do not test every pupil (they use a matrix sample). Consequently, they do not provide individual scores for use in admissions or placement. Illinois is implementing an expensive new state test to be given in the 11th and 12th grades, but there are no plans to use it for college admission and placement.

Universities provide some good reasons why they pay little attention to K-12 standards or assessments. Universities emphasize that they were not involved in the process of creating or refining K-12 standards. Moreover, state K-12 standards keep changing because of political or technical problems. The K-12 assessments are not evaluated to see how well they predict freshman grades (although this is not difficult to do). Universities hope that the SAT and ACT will make adjustments to accommodate these new K-12 standards, and feel more comfortable with the two assessments they know and can influence.

These disjunctures will be hard to fix unless there is an institutional center for K-16 reform. Very few states have any policy mechanism that can deal with K-16 standards alignment. As president of the California State Board of Education for several years, I never met with my higher education counterparts.

Higher education coordinating bodies do not include K-16 standards alignment within their purview. In short, there are few regular opportunities for K-12 educators to discuss standards issues with college and university faculty or policymakers. The professional lives of K-12 and higher education proceed in separate orbits.

In some states, the governor's office is the most logical place to put these fractured standards systems together, but higher education leaders want to guard their political independence from gubernatorial and legislative specification of admissions criteria. Because each state has a distinctive K-12 standards and assessment system, it is not clear what can be done nationally. President Clinton's advocacy of a national voluntary test has died after protests about states' rights in education. Perhaps the College Board could assume a leadership role.

Some states provide examples of a possible resolution. California tests each 11th grader for 400 minutes on math and language arts, and has additional state tests for science and social studies. Unlike Texas' TAAS test, the California state assessment is geared to university preparation needs. Indeed, California 11th grade math is considerably more advanced than the SAT or ACT.

Consequently, California universities could use the end-of-11th grade test for university admission, and restrict the SAT and ACT to out-of-state applicants. Also, the California K-12 assessment could be used instead of separate university placement tests, like the entry-level math and English tests required of all first-year students in the 22-campus California State University system.

Other states like North Carolina and Texas have implemented end-of-course statewide tests for college preparation courses. These tests could be reviewed by universities, and then incorporated within admission criteria.

Something should be done to assist students, who increasingly are asked to pass a bewildering array of K-12 and higher education tests and assessments that might make sense individually, but that do not add up to a coherent whole.

Michael W. Kirst is a professor of education at Stanford University. From 1975 to 1981 he was a member of the California State Board of Education, and was board president from 1977 to 1980.

The Washington Post, October 24, 1999

Discrepancies Mar New School Gauge

Montgomery Stresses Gains, Not Just State Test Results

By BRIGID SCHULTE
Washington Post Staff Writer

In the coming weeks, excited staff and parents will wrap Ashburton Elementary School with a giant blue ribbon. On Friday, it will be among a handful honored by the White House as one of the best schools in the country, a national Blue Ribbon school.

But for some, a slight nagging worry underlies all the pomp and festivities. The new Montgomery County schools superintendent, Jerry D. Weast, has pushed for a new way to measure schools, by their "productivity." His staff analyzed test scores and meticulously drew a map to illustrate the results, coloring "good" schools in green. The one other county school chosen as a Blue Ribbon school, Brooke Grove Elementary, is green.

The "bad" schools are red. And Ashburton is one of them.

Staff members were puzzled. One school official was blunt: "It just makes us look stupid. You go through a rigorous process to be named a Blue Ribbon school, and the next day, you find out you're not productive. What process is real?"

The "productivity map" has caused confusion and consternation but has definitely grabbed people's attention. It measures the rise or fall of the scores of a subset of students over several grades. And it says less about the state of Montgomery County schools than the style of the new superintendent. Weast has since acknowledged that the analysis needs refinement.

And that, says Board of Education member Stephen N. Abrams (At Large), is exactly why he voted to hire Weast. "Gunslingers do that," Abrams said. "Shoot first, ask questions later. I like the style."

Weast promised to be a "change agent" when he reported for duty Aug. 2. So within two weeks, he came up with the productivity map that he gleefully said turned the mythology of Montgomery schools on its head.

The mythology goes like this: Schools in affluent Potomac, Bethesda and Chevy Chase are the best. The "W" cluster, which includes Whitman, Wooton and Winston Churchill, is the most desirable. And the farther east of Interstate 270 a school is, the worse it gets. But on Weast's map, schools with high state test scores—such as Potomac, Bannockburn, Ashburton and Wyngate elementaries—were rated "less productive" because their test scores, though high, have not improved much. And schools with lower scores in the eastern part of the county—such as Galway, Kemp Mill and Beall elementaries—were rated "more productive" because their results have been climbing.

But to confuse matters further, of the 22 schools just recognized this year by Maryland education officials for making the most gains on their state test scores, on Weast's map, eight were rated productive. Four were in the red. And the rest were average.

Weast's map, handed out to reporters and published in the School Bulletin, sent shock waves through county schools. Weast had made clear that the map would help him intervene with or weed out bad teachers and principals. The map, he said, would guide him in deciding which school got more teachers, attention and money.

The map would help him identify those doing a good job so others could follow their lead. For instance, Brooke Grove might be considered a model, with voice mail for every teacher and brainstorming sessions across grade levels that Principal Eoline Cary leads at staff meetings. Parents take tests on parents night, and the PTA provides breakfast, snacks and beverages on student test day.

But Ashburton is hardly a slacker. The school's scores on county and state tests are among the highest. Teachers don't have to report to work until 8:20 a.m., and the parking lot is full at 8 a.m. The community is involved, spots in the on-site child-care center are coveted, volunteers are plentiful and children are happy, recognized not only for their grades but also for their SHINE program, which encourages neighborliness, helpfulness, imagination and enthusiasm.

"Ten years ago, our nickname was Trashburton, the facilities were old, we had high staff turnover and the community was older," said Wendy Cimmet, an assistant in the media center. "But we got a new building, a new principal, our scores went up and real estate agents are now touting the school. Now we're one of the best schools in Montgomery County. I don't really understand it. I don't know what they're missing."

Weast is now saying that this particular map is only a "concept" and that staff is working on a new one. But if his intent was to shake things up, he succeeded.

"They are shaking things. Boy, are they shaking," said one teacher, who asked not to be identified. "This has really put everyone on their ear."

"There was a real buzz among teachers on back-to-school night," said Maureen Fox, who has been active in the parents group at Bannockburn, a "low productive" school.

In fact, many in the county, including teachers and principals, actually like what Weast was trying to do: measure schools not just by their static test scores but by how much the scores move each year.

For his productivity map, Weast took math and reading scores from the county's Criterion Referenced Test and tracked how a student did from third grade to fourth grade or from fourth to fifth. Thus, the proficiency, or the high test score, was not what mattered, but the movement from year to year.

"Whether it's moving from 90 to 92 or 30 to 40, the expectation of parents is that we're moving each child. That there's growth. That there's value added regardless of the ability," Weast explained recently. "There ought to be some recognition that you're adding value regardless of where you start."

It's a message that resonates with Ellen DeYoung, former principal of Kemp Mill, where nearly half the students are poor and many don't speak English, yet the scores improved enough to garner the school a "productive" rating. "Our scores aren't super high," she said, "and, typically, what newspapers do every year, they publish the scores, and naturally parents and real estate agents judge you. It can get really discouraging when you have a needy population. This is a nice affirmation that we are working hard and it's showing."

Weast then looked at schools with similar demographics to compare their "productivity" ratings. What he found were swings by as much as 100 points. "We've got to start examining why that is," Weast said.

The analysis has drawn criticism because Weast used only a few students' scores to judge the whole school. And with the stakes so high, many said that was unfair.

"My daughter was suffering such bad allergies when she took her fifth-grade CRT, her score dropped 150 points," said Linna Barnes, president of the Montgomery County Council of PTAs. "She could have skewed the test scores with such a small sample. This map is exactly what people have been asking for, but it uses too narrow a measure."

For the new map, Weast directed staff to track more students' scores across more grades.

For higher-scoring schools, such as Ashburton, the rating can be hard to swallow. Critics of the map have used a Michael Jordan analogy: When you're really good, it's hard to get much better. But Weast's unofficial motto is: To whom much is given, much will be expected.

"Some schools look good, but when you consider the kind of student they have, they should be doing better," said Board of Education member Mona M. Signer (Rockville-Potomac). "So their scores are high, great. But I look at Broad Acres [Elementary], where children come to school with so many problems, and they do extremely well there."

William Sanders, pioneer of this growing national "value added" approach to measuring how well schools do by their students, calls high-scoring suburban schools that aren't reaching as high as they might "sliders and gliders."

Is that what Ashburton is? Laptop computers and sensitive weather forecasting equipment are arriving, awards from the state are given for scoring so high on tests. Hallways are plastered with photos of "Ashburton Superstars." Plaques and certificates line Principal Barbara Haughey's office bookshelves.

"No one is being laissez faire about any kind of indicator. This is about increasing rigor, and I embrace that," she said. Then she paused and added, "At the same time, we at Ashburton are going to celebrate our successes, of which there are many."

The Washington Post, September 27, 1999

TAKING A CHANCE ON PROMOTION

Some D.C. Schools Try Advancing Students With High Ambition but Low Test Scores

By DEBBI WILGOREN
Washington Post Staff Writer

Shaky grammar and spelling could not mask the ambition in 10-year-old Donna Montgomery's journal entry: *I think that summer school is great. Because I am learning much more than I did in regelar school. I hope i learn more than i know so that i can go on to the next grade.*

The choppy sentences were closer to fourth-grade level than the sixth-grade class to which Donna aspired. Just like the dismal test scores that landed her in summer school, they confirmed that she had not come close to mastering the fifth-grade curriculum.

But Donna's teachers and principal promoted her anyway. She is now a proud member of this year's sixth-grade class at Ketcham Elementary School in Anacostia—still struggling far below grade level but, according to her teacher, making progress.

"The light bulb turned on with Donna the last three weeks" of summer school, said Myrna Shields, a 29-year veteran who has Donna now and taught her this summer. "Given the opportunity . . . she can perform."

In Chicago and New York, which like the District have launched massive remedial summer programs in recent years, promotion from certain grades depends on standardized test scores before and after the summer session.

But D.C. Superintendent Arlene Ackerman lets principals and teachers decide who will advance, using classroom performance as well as the standard measurement, the Stanford 9 Achievement Test scores. Students took the test in the spring, and did not retake it after summer school.

While some D.C. elementary schools held back virtually all students whose test scores fell below Ackerman's recommended minimum, Ketcham Principal Romaine Thomas and others retained fewer than half.

The discrepancies reflect how complicated the question of whom to promote can be. Principals weigh the abilities of individual students and teachers, a child's motivation to move ahead and whether the school can provide him or her with extra tutoring and other help.

Thomas—who denied promotions to 18 of 42 possible students—believed Donna had built a strong bond with Shields and would benefit from being one of her 24 students, rather than returning to a significantly larger fifth-grade class. At her recommendation, Donna is receiving tutoring and other supplemental instruction this year.

"Just retention for the sake of retention does not work," Thomas said. "You've got to design a program that will meet [a student's] needs."

Shields is keeping close tabs on Donna, who says her concentration has improved, as well as her reading and math skills.

"I tried my best," Donna said on a recent lunch break, "so I could go to the sixth grade."

* * *

For years, research has shown that youngsters who repeat a grade are more likely than their peers to lose interest in school. Those held back twice almost always quit.

Thomas, Ketcham's principal since 1971, has read such studies. She sees retention as an absolute last resort, especially at her school, where most youngsters come from poorly educated, low-income families.

But in the face of growing national concern about low student achievement, school districts, states and the Clinton administration are searching for ways to keep students in school and move them closer to grade level.

"Educators must know they have alternatives to holding back students . . . which can be as detrimental" as promoting those who are not ready, Education Secretary Richard W. Riley wrote in a guide he issued this summer to school districts nationwide. "Otherwise, they may be reluctant to end the practice of social promotion."

The District does much of what the federal government espouses: improving teacher training and school curriculum, offering remedial Saturday and summer classes, and basing promotion decisions on more than standardized tests.

But the District has not developed transitional programs, as Riley recommends, with small classes and intense instruction that could help students catch up. Such programs are succeeding in Cincinnati, Long Beach, Calif., and elsewhere.

Asked if similar methods would help Donna and others like her, Shields nodded enthusiastically. She imagined working with 15 students—the summer school limit—or even fewer, assisted by an aide specially trained in reading strategies, a counselor to help youngsters put aside problems that plague them at home and other special resources.

"Just inundating them with the skills that they need," is how Shields described it. "Because their minds are open, and they have basic understanding."

Ackerman said she wants individual schools to "create the programs that they think will support their children the best, rather than mandate" a district-wide option.

But such initiatives are expensive and difficult for schools to create on their own.

Ackerman—who closely monitored summer school and promotion decisions in 1998—said she has barely studied the issue this year because she has been distracted by other crises. She had not asked how many students were denied promotions until The Washington Post requested the information early this month.

Principals reported that 2,767—or 9.2 percent—of last year's first- through fifth-graders were retained, about 300 fewer than last year. Nearly 700 students whose scores were below the recommended cutoff were promoted after summer school.

"In the last two years . . . we've gone from promoting everybody to holding 3,000 kids back," Ackerman said. "We're making progress. What we're trying to do is give these children extra time to learn."

New York's strict reliance on test scores proved disastrous this summer, when scoring errors by CTBS/McGraw Hill meant as many as 8,000 students were wrongly told they had to improve or be held back. Chicago, which pioneered the crackdown on promotions five years ago, will rely on teacher recommendations as well as test scores starting this year.

Ackerman said she will continue to study the D.C. data and track whether students retained this year receive the help they need to succeed.

"What sound?" Shields snapped her fingers in her summer school classroom one day, and the students pointed to an underlined portion of a word in their workbooks. The exercises broke words down into syllables and sounds—again and again and again.

Er! they chorused.

"What word?" *Pow-er-ful!*

"What sound?" *Sh!*

"What word?" *Blushed!*

"Very good."

It was hot in the room, but Shields's summer battles went beyond the heat. Workbook deliveries were delayed by more than a week, so she made do with materials left over from the Saturday remedial program. When she received the new books, they were a lower skill level than she wanted, and she was told—wrongly, according to a top school official interviewed for this story—that the more advanced books were reserved for middle school.

Some of Shields's fifth- and sixth-graders read so poorly that they were most comfortable with children's picture books she kept on a table in her classroom. As the summer progressed, they slowly mastered the stories in their workbooks. But they faltered when Shields handed out booklets titled "Taking the Terror Out of the Stanford 9," filled with difficult reading-comprehension questions like those on the test.

Donna, and many of her classmates, struggled to get even half of the answers right.

Shields said most of the youngsters were working on a fourth- or low fifth-grade level. All but Donna had Stanford 9 scores slightly above Ackerman's minimum for promotion to the sixth grade. But those scores still left them at the high end of the "below basic" category, which the testing company defines as "having little or no mastery" of grade-level skills.

"I guess you've got to start them on a level where they can work, then build them up," Shields said one day. Another time, she wondered whether having the higher-level workbooks might have helped bridge the gap.

Donna was too ashamed to tell her mother that she might have to repeat fifth grade. All summer, she missed only two days of class. She rushed home each afternoon to do homework, with the help of her prized dictionary, before heading outside to play.

"I'm going to feel embarrassed if I stay back," Donna explained one sticky morning. "All the other kids will pass, and I'm going to be the only one still in fifth."

Shields's class this school year includes Donna and 11 others she taught this summer. "I still get kids who can't even copy from the board," Shields said. "In all fairness . . . Donna works better than some kids who were passed" on the basis of their scores.

The class, including Donna, got off to a good start this fall and should all be on grade level by spring, Shields said.

"I don't know if it will be high sixth-grade level, though I will attempt to do that," Shields said after school one day. "But I know I will see significant improvement—I can tell that already."

On a recent morning, Shields asked her fledgling sixth-graders to read the introduction to a story, then guess what the plot would be. Donna raised her hand shyly to offer an answer, smiling as Shields told her she had done well.

When her turn came to read, she made no mistakes: *Moving slowly over damp brown leaves, Jenny could sense her ears tingle and fan out as she listened for thick breathing from the trees . . .*

"Excellent, Donna," Shields said.

Downstairs, Thomas pondered whether she had made the right decision. "This is a real challenge, to the whole nation," she said.

Thomas has arranged for Donna and other struggling students to receive specialized reading and math instruction several times a week. When a tutoring program staffed by Howard University students gets underway, Donna will be matched with a tutor. She will also be encouraged to attend remedial math and reading classes to be held on Saturdays starting next month.

Donna's progress will be measured in large part by how she does on diagnostic Stanford 9 exams that all D.C. students begin taking today, and how much she improves when she takes the end-of-the-year exams next spring.

"I'm hoping it will work out," Thomas said, her eyebrows anxious. "And if at the end of the year, I have to retain her at Ketcham school, we'll feel comfortable in doing that."

***The Washington Post*, December 14, 1999**

E. J. Dionne Jr.

When Teachers Cheat

In the midst of phone calls from radio and television networks in Britain, Germany, Australia and Canada, the man who uncovered the New York City school cheating scandal took time out to reflect on why it has caused such a stir.

"It's like a man bites dog story," Ed Stancik, the special investigator for New York City's schools, said in an interview. "The teachers are cheating on the kids' tests."

Man bites dog indeed. What Stancik uncovered—with help, it must be said up front, from some honest teachers—are cases where teachers changed kids' answers on standardized tests from wrong to right.

Stancik, a former rackets investigator in the Manhattan District Attorney's office, fingered 43 teachers, two principals and two other school workers in 32 schools for participating in some form of cheating.

Why would teachers do such a thing? Welcome to the world of "high stakes testing." The new wave in education reform—and it's the right wave—is for "accountability" in schools and "high standards." There are only so many ways you can ensure accountability and standards. One of the main ones is testing.

Careers, pay and the amount of money states confer on schools hang increasingly on improving test results. Now we learn some teachers and principals don't seem to care how they do it.

That fact was a powerful tipoff for Stancik's investigators. "We started to look for stories based on miracle turnarounds," he said. There was, for example, The Miracle at P.S. 234, where the proportion of third-graders reading at grade level skyrocketed from 29 percent to 51 percent.

It was no miracle. There was cheating. "What you see in some of the miracle schools," Stancik says of his investigation of four years of testing, "are kids who were in the 10th percentile one year, in the 90th percentile the next year, then switched schools, were back in the 10th percentile—and then dropped out."

In a campaign in which presidential candidates will talk incessantly about school reform, the New York City experience is an injection of painful reality. New York isn't the only place where school administrators have cooked the testing books. In October the school board in Austin, Tex., avoided a criminal trial on charges of tampering with achievement test scores by reforming the system. Connecticut and Kentucky have also suffered through cheating and the manipulation of scores.

The worst response to all this would be to throw out testing. "The anti-test, anti-accountability people will say: Look what happens when you put stakes on these tests and put pressure on educators around them," says Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust, a group that pushes for better teaching. If used properly and—here's the important part—in conjunction with real school reform, she says, testing can help identify failing schools and lead to help for students who need it.

The New York scandal, says Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers, "will be used not just by foes of public schools who say public schools are hopeless but also by foes of higher standards." She wants to preserve standards, but proclaiming them isn't enough. "You can't assume that just by having the standard in place, kids are automatically going to meet it."

The United Federation of Teachers, the New York City AFT affiliate, had a rather more ambiguous response. While denouncing cheating, UFT President Randi Weingarten said her union was sponsoring its own investigation. She questioned whether Stancik painted with too much of a "broad brush" in suggesting that "cheating is rampant and widespread." But even she acknowledged that the cases Stancik pointed to were "egregious."

As with almost everything in New York City schools, there are political overtones. They have to do with feuding between Mayor Rudy Giuliani and school Chancellor Rudy Crew and the timing of Stancik's report.

That's for the New York pols to sort out. For the rest of us, Stancik has taught some lessons. School administrators and teachers who care more about their careers than their kids don't belong in the schools. Testing won't do any good if there's cheating, and it's a meaningless tool unless it's used as a road map to improving teaching and learning.

And that won't happen unless candidates—for president and for local school boards—talk about what improvements they'll make *after* the test results are in. High-stakes testing without high-stakes reform will simply show what low stakes we place on children.

The New York Times, December 8, 1999

Lessons: One Standard Doesn't Fit All

By Richard Rothstein

Standards-based reform" has two contradictory meanings. Some policy makers want minimum standards representing what all students must know for promotion or graduation. Others want high standards as goals toward which all students should strive but not all may achieve. Schools need both, but one standard cannot do both jobs. This is why ill-conceived efforts by many states to force one set of standards to serve simultaneously as minimums and goals are putting the entire accountability movement at risk.

New York, for example, has adopted high standards, the Regents exams, a goal previously indicating academic readiness for college. If those become a minimum that all graduates must pass, the state must deny diplomas to a third (or more) of its adolescents, with disastrous social consequences.

To postpone this, passing scores were lowered this year. If they remain low so most students can pass, Regents exams will no longer challenge students who scored just below the old higher passing score and, with hard work and better instruction, might qualify for college. Preparing more students for college is a worthy goal. But by confusing this with the more dubious one of requiring that all qualify, "standards" have backed New York into a corner.

Even with major changes, normal differences in student abilities and teachers' skill will cause a wide variation in achievement. Typically, scores are distributed around an average. Most are close to average, some far distant.

In graphs, scores look "bell" shaped. A middle bulge represents most students performing near average. Left and right "tails" represent the few who are far below or above it. But this simple statistical truth is nearly taboo because a widely publicized 1994 book, "The Bell Curve," asserted that race determined academic potential. Many people hesitate to acknowledge normal bell-shaped distributions of ability, fearful of reinforcing the book's discredited argument. But we can reject the racial claims and still recognize other normal variation.

Bell-shaped distributions are common, not unique to testing. You could, for example, graph batting averages of last year's regular National League players. A bulge at the bell's top represents average .277 hitters. The graph tails off at each end. Larry Walker (hitting .379) is at the far right, with Eli Marrero (hitting .192) at the left.

Most players are approximately average hitters, as most students are approximately average learners. The middle two-thirds are "typical," bunched in the bell's bulge.

Statisticians measure their "bunched togetherness," using the term "standard deviation" for the point range of about one-third of all scorers whose achievement is just below (or just above) average. In batting last year, the standard deviation was 34 -- surrounding the .277 average, about two-thirds of batters hit between .243 and .311. Another sixth were below or above this range.

Student achievement is similar. Consider the National Assessment of Educational Progress, given to a nationwide student sample. On most N.A.E.P. tests, fourth grade scores that are only one standard deviation above average (fourth grade scores at about the 84th percentile) are higher than average eighth grade scores.

We should push students to do better—raising the floor by tightening the left tail, and shifting the entire bell curve to the right. But even if we achieve these distinct objectives, all students will not perform identically. Many fourth graders above a new higher fourth grade average still are likely to overlap with many eighth graders below a new higher eighth grade average.

We simply cannot set one standard applicable to all. The passing point on any test will reflect abilities of students at that point along the bell curve, and can challenge only those whose abilities are just below that point. For the rest, it must either be impossibly hard (leading to unacceptable failure rates), or too easy (leading to little overall improvement).

New York once had two standards. Regents Competency Tests were a minimum, Regents exams a goal. We should gradually have raised the content of both. Instead, we have tried to make one test do both jobs, baldly asserting that if some students can reach high goals, all can. The result is that policy makers, educators and students have been embarrassed by high failure rates.

Expecting all students, with their wide variability, to aim for one goal is statistically foolish. It is like demanding that every ballplayer hit .277: After we sent all below-average batters back to the minor leagues, few major league teams could take the field.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Teacher Quality

Would-be teachers must typically pass through all sorts of hoops and hurdles en route to the public school classroom, but Thomas L. Williams falsified his identity and got there anyway. It was not until after students, parents, and administrators agreed that he was doing an outstanding job that they learned he was a fake, at least in terms of his formal credentials. His story provides an interesting commentary on the current state of teacher certification. Just how badly needed are those credentials that Mr. Williams didn't get? Read it in Susan Edelman's *New York Post* article, "Students Say 'Fake' Teacher was Grade A."

In a similar vein we find the tale of Bill Corrow, a retired Air Force colonel who volunteered to teach a history course about world conflict – something he knows quite a bit about. Like Williams, Corrow has been lauded by parents, administrators, and fellow teachers. The unions, however, want no part of him, claiming that he threatens the jobs of other teachers because he has no certificate and refuses to be paid. Get the details in Kathleen Burge's *Boston Globe* story, "Not Free to Teach for Free?"

Even as many qualified people who want to teach find it difficult to gain entry, a lot of schools suffer from a dearth of quality teachers. And, as Nanette Asimov points out in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, it is the nation's least fortunate students who most often seem to get the least able instructors. In "Neediest Students Get Least-Prepared Teachers," Asimov describes this sad state of affairs for students in Oakland and Los Angeles in particular.

One approach to boosting teacher quality is by "Rewarding Teachers for Work Well Done." While some argue that it's unfair to pay some teachers more than others, this *Baltimore Sun* editorial points out that it is deeply unfair to students to withhold merit pay from teachers who are effective. What kind of incentive system is appropriate? In his *Los Angeles Times* article, "Opposing Forces Tug on Teachers," Richard Lee Colvin describes the certification that master teachers can obtain from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. While not many have earned it yet, those who have done so in California, for example, can receive bonuses as large as $10,000 and raises of up to fifteen percent. (Not everyone is enamored of the National Board, of course, especially since it does not tie teacher rewards to student performance.)

The U.S. is not the only nation struggling with these issues. In Britain, the *Economist's* "Caning the Teachers" tells us, Prime Minister Tony Blair continues to gain both allies and opponents as he seeks to modernize his country's schools in part by proposing to institute performance-related pay for teachers.

LEF

The New York Post, September 30, 1999

STUDENTS SAY 'FAKE' TEACH WAS GRADE A

Susan Edelman Education Reporter

Parents and kids say an accused scam artist charged with faking his credentials was one of the best teachers they ever had.

"He knew his job," said Winston Hughes, whose son, Lenny, had alleged teacher-impersonator Thomas L. Williams in fifth grade last year at PS 110 in The Bronx.

"When my son messed up in school, Mr. Williams called my house at night to let us know. When Lenny was falling back, Mr. Williams picked him up," said the grateful dad.

Lenny, 11, said Williams - who took the class on trips to McDonald's, an aquarium, and the Hall of Science - was his hero.

"He helped me read, he helped me in math, and he helped me with social studies when I really needed it. I was shocked to hear that he was in jail."

Williams, arrested Monday and being held at the Manhattan House of Detention, stole the identity of a former city teacher named Thomas E. Williams, using his birth date, Social Security number and Board of Ed file number to get hired in 1996, prosecutors say.

The 33-year-old faces eight charges, including grand larceny, forgery, criminal impersonation and defrauding the government.

One dad was torn.

"He didn't abuse anybody. He didn't hurt any kids. If anything he tried to help the kids," said Franklin Walker, whose daughter, Cabria, had Williams last year.

"But I would prefer to have honest people teach my children."

Meanwhile, sympathy mixed with anger as parents met with Principal David Cutie to find out how the Board of Ed could put a convicted felon - Williams was convicted of impersonating a nurse at Harlem Hospital in 1987 - in classrooms for more than three years.

While working as a teacher in 1997, Williams was busted on charges of assault and aggravated harassment against his "live-in boyfriend."

"The Board of Ed let the children down," said Claudia Harper, whose son, Jeffrey, was put in Williams' fifth-grade class this month. "How did he slip through the cracks? We need answers."

No one from the Board of Ed or District 9 came to the meeting to offer any.

Cutie barred The Post from the meeting and refused to comment, but parents said he was furious about the fraud, apologized, and vowed to check the credentials of other recently hired teachers.

The principal admitted that he too was fooled. Each time he observed Williams in class, he liked what he saw, the parents said. Williams got the highest ratings.

Special Schools Investigator Ed Stancik is still tracking how Williams tricked the Board of Ed - and whether it ignored red flags that he was a fake.

Boston Globe, November 22, 1999

NOT FREE TO TEACH FOR FREE?

UNION TRIES TO OUST VOLUNTEER TEACHER AS VT. SCHOOL RALLIES BEHIND HIM

By Kathleen Burge, Globe Correspondent, 11/22/99

WILLIAMSTOWN, Vt. - After a quarter-century in some of the world's most troubled places, Bill Corrow came home to Vermont. A former teacher and retired Air Force colonel, Corrow started volunteering at the local high school, teaching a course called "Conflict in the 20th Century."

The class quickly became a magnet for the school's best students, who liked Corrow's first-hand knowledge and his insistence on hard work. The school's guidance counselor began recommending the class for college-bound students.

Yet as word of his teaching spread, Corrow found himself drawn, again, into the fray. The union that represents the teachers demanded that Williamstown Middle-High School fire Corrow, who has been blunt at times in his criticisms of the quality of teaching at the school. The union argues that he is not properly certified and that he violates the union contract by teaching for free.

"We have a district curriculum," said Kevin Lawrence, an English teacher at the high school who filed the initial union complaint against Corrow. The curriculum cannot be ignored, he said, asking, "What if a teacher wanted to teach a course on the fact that the Nazi experience never happened?"

The school argues that Corrow's teaching is legal and that, more important, he challenges the best students in a class that would not exist without him. To keep him, they will, in the words of Superintendent Clif Randolph, "go all the way to the Supreme Court."

Last week, the union tried to reach a settlement with the school district. Corrow could continue teaching, union negotiators suggested, if he worked under the supervision of another teacher and his course did not carry credit.

The fight resonates in many of the smallest, poorest schools in New England. They cannot, they say, afford to hire the teachers to offer enough challenging electives such as the one Corrow teaches.

Vermont, like most states, does not mandate special classes for the gifted, estimated to be about 15 percent of the school population. Even the smartest students, if they are bored in class, can act out or drop out, said Virginia Palmer, president of the Vermont Council for Gifted Education.

"I get a lot of calls from people wanting to know what we can do for these kids," she said. The effects "of not paying attention to these kids, and not providing for them what's appropriate, can sometimes be severe. We don't want to lose these kids."

In Williamstown, the parents have been abuzz with the news of the Corrow controversy. People have been talking about the brouhaha when they run into one another in parking lots and at the bank, even at a teachers' meeting two towns away. Many parents have told Corrow they support him, saying they will sign petitions and do whatever they can to keep him teaching.

"They are appalled," said Roxann McLam, a registered nurse whose daughter is in Corrow's class. "We should be thanking him, not putting him in hot water."

Williamstown is the kind of town where tourists rarely venture, where the local gasoline station advertises hunters' breakfasts, harvest suppers, and snowmobile safety courses. It is not a lack of beauty that keeps tourists away. The main road that glides down a hill into Williamstown reveals a stunning view of the Green Mountains.

But Williamstown does not have the well-kept inns, coffee shops, and bookstores that compete for sidewalk space in the tourist haunts. There is a church, a bank, and a minimart, but no newspaper, radio station, or movie theater. Mobile homes dot the town's main roads.

At the combined middle school-high school on the hill, there are about 50 students in each grade. The squat, flat-roofed building was constructed in the golden age of the open classroom, and flimsy, makeshift walls separate the classrooms.

Here, there are barely enough teachers to cover the basics. This year, the school dropped Advanced Placement English because there was no one available to teach it.

"Williamstown's one of those schools where teachers come, learn how to become a teacher, and go off somewhere else where there's better pay," said Jaime Pullman, a junior in Corrow's class. "He's here for us."

Students planning on college worry that their transcripts will offer little to catch the eyes of admissions officials. Junior Laura McLam is taking a class at nearby Norwich University to keep from having three study halls in a row. "If [Corrow] wasn't offering this course, I'd have to take gym or art or something I don't need," said McLam, who said she thinks the class is so important that the school should make it mandatory.

Corrow is direct in his criticism of the school, and that bluntness, coming from someone who is not a career teacher, has irked some colleagues. "I felt that some of the teaching in our classrooms was inadequate," he said. "We were graduating kids who had difficulty reading, who didn't know when to use `their' or `there,' or how many o's are after which `to.'"

Corrow is a large man, with sharp blue eyes, gray hair, and wire-framed glasses. His hero is retired General Colin Powell. In town, Corrow is considered both demanding and gentle. This year, he gave his class a list of five books to read over the summer, an unheard-of assignment. And he returns papers covered with comments.

But he also gives students his home telephone number and calls them, affectionately, "gang."

Corrow's own career - he left the small town of Newport, along the Canadian border, to see the world - "shows someone from Vermont can go out in the world and make a difference," McLam said.

"Or make it at all," Pullman added.

The National Education Association does not deny that Corrow has been able to reach students. "I'm not here to talk about good job/bad job," said Lawrence, the teacher who filed the complaint.

But to the union, turning to volunteers means abandoning the idea that instructors be certified to teach their subject.

"Every other teacher is held to those standards," said NEA representative Mark Hage. "I see no reason Mr. Corrow should be allowed to side-step them."

Lawrence said he is also frustrated that the course was not designed to complement the school's existing classes. Sometimes when he starts teaching a new subject, Lawrence said, his students tell him they have already covered the material in Corrow's class.

It also rankles NEA officials that Corrow is teaching a class on his own, with credit and full responsibility for grades. As a volunteer, Corrow could help out in another teacher's class, talking about his military experience or coaching students on their writing, Hage said.

School officials "certainly know what the laws of Vermont required," Hage said. "For reasons I don't fully understand, they chose to ignore them."

Hage emphasizes that he is not condemning volunteers wholesale. When he was a teacher himself, he often brought in community members to speak to his students. Now he volunteers at his son's school.

Other administrators, too, have used volunteers without the controversy that has followed Corrow. When Palmer coordinated a gifted education program at a small school in New Hampshire, she brought in volunteers to help students with projects. A poet helped a 10-year-old girl write her own poetry. An engineer volunteered to help two boys build a model solar car.

In Williamstown, the principal, the school board, and the district superintendent have rejected the union's argument. If the school district does not accept the union's offer this week, the dispute could go to an arbitrator and then to the state's labor board.

Corrow has assured his students that the class will not be canceled midyear. But he, too, is frustrated by the clamor. "If Lawrence of Arabia arrived here and said, `I would like to do a course in Anglo-Arab studies,' unless he was certified to teach he couldn't do that?"

San Francisco Chronicle, December 3, 1999

NEEDIEST STUDENTS GET LEAST-PREPARED TEACHERS: STUDY FINDS SITUATION CUTS ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Nanette Asimov, Chronicle Staff Writer

California's lowest-scoring students are five times more likely than high-scoring children to be placed in classrooms with underqualified teachers, making it that much harder for them to catch up academically, top educators say in a report to be released today.

They say the problem is so bad that half of California's estimated $2.6 billion budget surplus should be spent on improving the quality of the teaching profession, enticing experienced, credentialed teachers into low- performing schools and drawing qualified people into the profession.

Not only does California lack such incentives, the system discourages prospective teachers from finishing their education by making it easy for them to get a paid classroom job—usually in overcrowded districts such as Oakland and Los Angeles that are desperate for instructors.

Those are some of the conclusions reached by educators from the University of California, California State University, several school boards and districts, county offices of education and research groups.

"There is tremendous overlap between underperforming schools and the ones with underprepared teachers," said Margaret Gaston, co-director of the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, a Santa Cruz research group that co-sponsored the study.

"More than a million children in California go to school where they have particularly high concentrations of teachers who are underprepared to teach them," she said. "You can argue that, of anyone, poor, minority children ought to have first crack at prepared teachers."

Last year, the state handed out 85 percent more "emergency credentials" than it did just three years ago: 28,500 in 1998, compared with 15,400 in 1996. This surge of instructors who have not been completely trained has helped ease a shortage caused by the reduction of elementary school class sizes.

Most of the underqualified teachers went straight into classrooms filled with students of poverty who have low scores on academic performance tests.

The study found that, on average, 21 percent of teachers lacked credentials in schools where the reading scores of third- graders averaged in the bottom 25 percent of state tests.

By contrast, just 4 percent of teachers lacked credentials in schools where the reading scores averaged in the top 25 percent.

"At some point, as the percentage of underqualified teachers grows, the school's overall functioning is impaired," the study said, noting that many schools must provide on- the-job training. The more teachers on staff who need such training, the less able schools are to provide it.

"One in five schools in the state falls into this category," the report said.

A disadvantaged child who spends a year with an inexperienced teacher will generally improve less than a similar student with an experienced teacher, said Linda Bond, a director with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing and an adviser on the study.

"After two years with an inexperienced teacher, you have severely impaired the children's ability to catch up," she said. "Research shows that having an experienced teacher can make up for the disadvantages that come with poverty."

How California traded in one of the nation's most admired public school systems for one now infamous for its rock-bottom achievement is the story of soaring enrollment, below-average funding, and, according to the new report, a willingness to let underqualified instructors into the classroom.

The report recommends 23 changes to California's teacher- training system that it says would cost $1.3 billion. Here is a sampling of the proposals:

- Raise the beginning salary from $32,000 to $40,000 for qualified teachers.
- Pay at least $20,000, plus tuition fees and book costs, to those who complete a teacher preparation program and go on to teach in a hard-to-staff school for at least four years. This would expand current programs that pay an $11,000 incentive.
- Provide grants of $350 per student for up to three years to help schools attract and keep qualified teachers.
- Phase out credential waivers and emergency permits over the next five years.
- Review local practices to reduce delays in hiring teachers and identify steps that districts and teacher unions can take to pair qualified teachers with the students who need them most.
- Provide incentives of up to $250 per student for high quality on-the-job training of teachers.

THE INTERNET

The new report, "Teaching and California's Future: The Status of the Teaching Profession," will be available, after its release, on the Internet at www.cftl.org, or from the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, at 133 Mission St., Suite 220, Santa Cruz, CA 95060.

Information about how to earn a teaching credential can be found on the Web site of the state's Commission on Teacher Credentialing, at www.ctc.ca.gov or by calling (916) 445-0184.

BALTIMORE SUN, NOVEMBER 17, 1997

REWARDING TEACHERS FOR WORK WELL DONE

Editorial

Incentives: Another way to look at student performance and compensation issues.

SAY "performance pay" in the company of most teachers and you'd better duck to avoid being pelted with questions about fairness.

How can you hold teachers responsible for students' academic achievement, they ask, when so many kids come to school with empty bellies, raggedy clothes or deep emotional scars from their chaotic lives? How can you expect teachers to teach without sufficient pencils, books, or without enough support?

Those are reasonable questions.

And as the idea of linking teacher pay to student achievement catches fire in Maryland and around the country, no one ought to dismiss the obstacles that trip up good teachers who try to make a difference.

New Prince George's County Superintendent Iris T. Metts needs to balance expectations against classroom realities as she pursues performance pay in her schools. State Superintendent Nancy S. Grasmick must ensure fairness doesn't get trampled in the rush toward teacher accountability statewide.

But here's another smart query about performance pay for teachers—one that doesn't always receive equal attention in the debate: Is the current pay structure—which rewards only length of service and level of education—fair to teachers who get their students' achievement to soar despite their environments or lack of materials?

You only need look as far as Pimlico Elementary in Northwest Baltimore to answer that question with a resounding "No."

At Pimlico, nearly all the students come from impoverished neighborhoods near Upper Park Heights. Supplies and parental support are no more abundant than they are at other city schools. It's a place where Principal Sarah Horsey's playful singing in the halls masks problems like drug-addicted parents or abused children.

That hasn't stopped Ms. Horsey and her staff from excelling with their children, but the current pay system hasn't rewarded Pimlico's instructors any differently than teachers whose children can't read or write.

Pimlico Elementary teachers got no bonuses in 1997 when their students posted 17-point gains over their previous year's score on state reading tests. There was no incentive plan that inspired them to get the school's basic-skills test scores to rank with those of better-off elementaries like Mount Washington and Roland Park.

The best Ms. Horsey could do was a crab feast and endless accolades—nice reinforcements, but hardly the same as cash.

"We celebrate our successes, believe me," Ms. Horsey says. "But money would make a difference. Some will do their best work because of an intrinsic desire to have our kids do well, but others need that external prod as well."

Ms. Horsey knows it wouldn't be fair to expect teachers with the slowest children to make the same progress as teachers with the quickest students. She knows if teachers don't think a performance pay system is equitable, they won't buy into it.

But she also knows her teachers deserve better than they're getting. And they give even more despite the lack of incentives.

Thirteen of Ms. Horsey's experienced teachers are mentoring rookie instructors this year. Teachers and administrators in the school have helped build a PTA that draws as many as 300 parents to meetings.

And this year, when one of her first-grade teachers fell ill, the others stepped in so Ms. Horsey didn't have to hire a substitute.

They worried that a substitute might take too long figuring out the school's reading program and the children would fall behind.

So they asked to divide the sick teacher's children among themselves, raising their own class sizes and increasing their workloads for the good of the school.

"Shouldn't they be rewarded for doing that?" Ms. Horsey asked. "Teachers just want to be appreciated for all they do. Is that so unreasonable?"

It's not. And as this debate unfolds, teachers who might benefit from a good performance pay system shouldn't be shouted down by those who fear what will happen to those who won't make the cut.

Los Angeles Times, December 8, 1999

Opposing Forces Tug on Teachers

By RICHARD LEE COLVIN

Wednesday, December 8, 1999

Whither teaching?

Is it blossoming into a true profession, with a body of knowledge and accepted practices that must be mastered? With salaries that rise with accomplishments?

Or is it a grim way station on the way to a real career that is more lucrative, more respectable or, at the very least, less frustrating?

Typical of the crosscurrents that rip through education, there's evidence for both.

Support for the first scenario can be found in the career arc of Celeste Fobia-McClure, a first-grade teacher at a magnet school for music, the Hillcrest Center for Enriched Studies in the Crenshaw area of Los Angeles. Now in her 28th year on the job, she has spent the past seven mentoring younger teachers. Last month, she earned certification by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

That accomplishment took her two tries and, she estimates, more than 400 hours in which she assembled lesson plans, critiqued student work, demonstrated her skills in a videotaped lesson and provided examples of her interactions with parents and colleagues. In addition, she had to pass tests on academic subjects and cognition.

"This has recharged my battery," she says with infectious enthusiasm. "I'm so impressed with the quality of the people I worked with. To be part of this is the most rewarding thing I've ever done."

The goal of the Michigan-based board, created in 1987, is to promote good teaching by figuring out what it looks like and then certifying those who do it. Support has come from major foundations and the federal government, which have poured more than $120 million into the effort.

Now, it's achieving critical mass. In 1998, there were more than 1,800 board-certified teachers. This year, 3,000 more joined them.

Thirty-eight states and numerous local districts now offer incentives for teachers to participate. California, for example, hands out a one-time bonus of $10,000. And the Los Angeles Unified School District grants a raise of 15%. That's led to 118 district teachers achieving certified status, a number greater than in 46 states.

Not everyone is enthusiastic. Some conservatives, notably Chester Finn Jr., a former assistant U.S. secretary of education for research, think the criteria are too squishy and philosophical and promote teaching methods that do little to raise test scores.

But Betty Castor, a former Florida commissioner of education and university president who now heads the board, says: "I want to sit down with Finn and show him what they have to know."

There's nothing easy, she says, about being prepared to write about 52 classics of literature, which the board requires high school English teachers to do. History teachers must, for example, be able to look at a political cartoon from, say, the 1920s, and write about the issue that prompted it and how it played out.

Castor was in town last week to promote board certification in California. The goal is to have 100,000 such teachers by 2006, and without participation here, that won't happen. She also knows the board must prove that students of certified teachers learn more.

* * *

Meanwhile, a counter-trend is at work: the growing number of teachers working under emergency permits, which in many cases is but a bureaucratic fig leaf that means they walked in off the street. Those numbers are so great—three in four teachers hired in L.A. Unified this year—that "on the job" training is becoming the norm.

The problem is that most don't stick around long enough for that training to pay off, with as many as half quitting in the first year. Teaching in many urban areas has become a temporary job like waiting on tables while looking for that big break in show business.

It's understandable why many quit. One such teacher, who works at a middle school in South-Central, was nearly in tears as she described her experience.

An aspiring screenwriter, she had never taught before and received only five days of training in things such as how to record attendance. When she arrived at the school this fall, she wasn't even given a lesson guide. She had 10 books for 40 students. She's been all but ignored by the principal and her more experienced colleagues. Students curse at her and threaten her. One student who is still in school there slapped a teacher.

Once she taught an entire period in a classroom with blood on the floor and desks—from a student fight. Janitors had been called but didn't show up.

"It's the most horrible, horrible place I've ever been in in my entire life," she said.

Still, she needs the job, so she didn't want her name used. She hopes to stick it out until at least after Christmas. But she's not confident she can. Then, the revolving door will turn and some other aspirant will take her place.

The Economist, October 23, 1999

Caning the teachers

Tony Blair hopes that head teachers will be his allies against the "forces of conservatism" in Britain's schools

WHEN Tony Blair declared war on the "forces of conservatism" at the Labour Party conference last month, he did not only have the political right in mind (see Bagehot). He has also trained his sights on "conservatives" on the left. In a speech on October 21st he fired a salvo at one group of them: teachers who are opposed to his government's plans to reform Britain's schools. "We must also take on," he said, "the culture of excuses which still infects some parts of the teaching profession."

The prime minister sees education as the key to his efforts to "modernise" Britain. He and David Blunkett, the education secretary, have pressed ahead with reform plans, building (strangely) on ideas inherited from those die-hard opponents of progress, the Conservatives. There are now more, and more detailed, league tables of schools' examination results. The private sector has been brought in to run state schools which have performed badly under the control of local education authorities (LEAS). Some failing schools have been closed altogether. The teaching unions and the LEAS loathe most of this. Moreover, the unions and LEAS are bastions of left-wing politics. This makes them prime examples of left-wing conservatives.

However, Mr Blair is doing more than identifying enemies in schools. He is seeking allies too. He gave this week's speech to a conference of 400-odd new head teachers, an event sponsored by the Department for Education and Employment. He hopes that heads, especially these younger ones, will be the vanguard of further reforms. In particular, head teachers are being pressed to take the lead role in implementing two of the government's most cherished—and most controversial—reforms. These are the introduction of performance-related pay (PRP) for teachers, and breaking the grip of the LEAS on school budgets. Both are steps towards making head teachers, in effect, the chief executives of their schools.

Ministers consider that teachers' pay must be linked to pupils' performance if standards are to be raised and the best teachers are to be kept in the classroom. Currently a classroom teacher can earn no more than £23,000 ($38,000) outside London, and a little more in the capital. If they want more pay, teachers have to take on administrative responsibilities and spend less time teaching. Under the PRP scheme proposed by ministers, teachers will qualify for a special assessment once their pay reaches £23,000. The head, or another senior teacher, will decide what pupils in these teachers' classes could be expected to achieve by the end of the year. If the classes meet these expectations, teachers would be paid more—an extra £2,000 at first, rising to perhaps £7,000 in later years. Assessments will be scrutinised by external monitors to ensure fairness. The government estimates that 110,000 teachers (out of a total of 415,000) would reach the top of the regular pay scale, and so qualify for such assessments, at some point in their careers.

This gives the heads both more responsibility and more power. It could also set heads against both teachers and their unions: the National Union of Teachers, the biggest union, has damned PRP as divisive. So ministers are also offering heads incentives to compensate them for the extra burden. There will be a new "Leadership College" for head teachers, at Nottingham University. The college will give head teachers management training and other support. And as part of a £30m package to improve head teachers' training during 2000-01, every new one will be given a free laptop computer.

If all goes to plan, the first PRP schemes could be in place by next autumn. Downing Street officials claim that their PRP system is a pioneering one. This is just as well, as the PRP schemes that have been tried in America have not met with great success. Nonetheless, the city of Denver, Colorado, has just introduced an experimental "merit pay" system with the reluctant co-operation of teachers' unions (see page 28).

In Britain, however, the forces of conservatism are promising fierce resistance. Left-wingers in the National Union of Teachers have called for a strike and have formed a pressure group, School Teachers Opposed to Performance Pay. They point to a recent opinion poll which showed that only 17% of those teachers eligible for assessment under the government's proposals would apply for extra pay. In London, 60% of teachers said that PRP would not be fair. But the government hopes that it can bring enough teachers round. Some of the smaller unions have given PRP a cautious welcome. But ministers' best hope lies in the long-term effect of PRP on what teachers can expect to earn. As one government source put it, "For teachers who are just doing a competent job, they will lose nothing. Teachers can only gain."

Mr Blair has also threatened to wield a big stick against the LEAS. They have been accused of retaining too much of the money that they receive from government for their own bureaucracy. All LEAS have now been set targets to hand on more money to schools. According to government figures Kensington and Chelsea, in London, spends £167 per pupil on administration, while Oxfordshire spends just £17. The average is £49. Mr Blair warned LEAS this week that Mr Blunkett will cap the money they hold back for administration if they do not meet the targets. Many of the offending LEAS are Labour-controlled, which promises battles between the prime minister and members of his own party.

Like PRP, this will increase the managerial role of head teachers. The government hopes that power will follow money, and the heads and school governors will gradually take over responsibility for running their own schools from the LEAS. And, say ministers, there will be no lack of money to spend: they claim to be dishing out an extra £19 billion on education over the next three years.

There is no doubt, given his huge parliamentary majority, that Mr Blair can press on with his reforms. Nor are teachers so popular with the public that their unions can expect to face him down. But the question remains: will his reforms actually improve education? In particular, PRP may keep good teachers in the classroom, but it is unlikely to entice many into the teaching profession.

Relatively poor pay and the wealth of job opportunities in a buoyant economy have made teaching, like many other public-sector jobs, unattractive (see chart). In London, a graduate starting in teaching earns £17,700, rising to £25,500 at the top of the scale, if he or she stays in the classroom. According to Incomes Data Services, a graduate could expect to start on £25,000 as a solicitor, or £28,000 as a chartered accountant. And the salary gap widens with experience.

In the hope of attracting bright graduates, Mr Blunkett is promising that those with first-class or upper second-class degrees will be given a £5,000 bonus at the start of their teaching career. Thereafter they will be eligible for fast-track promotion and higher pay, rather like fast-stream civil servants. This will help, but may not be enough.

And to make their reforms work, ministers will eventually have to win round the "forces of conservatism" in the teaching profession. Many heads, as well as classroom teachers, are opposed to the government's plans. So even if many head teachers do join the prime minister's pioneer corps, the modernisation of education promises to be a painful struggle.

Curriculum and Content

We start with "Constructing Knowledge, Reconstructing Schooling," an article from *Educational Leadership*. According to authors John Abbott and Terence Ryan, recent studies of the brain suggest that students learn more when their curiosity is given the chance to take over and guide their schooling adventure. This research, they believe, lends credence to constructivism, the approach to education that emphasizes experiential and student-directed learning. "Summerhill Revisited," by Alan Riding of the *New York Times*, takes us to A.S. Neill's famous (or infamous) progressive/constructivist school in England, which has fallen on hard times and is strongly challenged by those who prefer a more traditional education for their children.

Mary Eberstadt is one who cautions against the hegemony of progressivism and constructivism. In "The Schools They Deserve: Howard Gardner and the Remaking of Elite Education," published in *Policy Review*, she suggests that egalitarian rhetoric can seduce those who educate disadvantaged students even as it removes "all means by which they might elevate themselves," i.e., objective criteria such as grades and tests. Elite students who come from advantaged backgrounds, she says, may endure testlessness and score well at the other end. She sets long odds, however, for those who do not have concerned, educated parents to come home to. (She also digs a pretty deep grave for some of Gardner's ideas.)

"If It's Tuesday (In Chicago), It Must Be Polygons" describes a semi-militaristic school management strategy in Chicago where nothing is left to chance and teachers are given "a regime of strict marching orders that spells out exactly what, when and how to teach," writes Abraham McLaughlin of the *Christian Science Monitor*. Some—often younger—teachers find the scripts they receive helpful skeletons upon which to build their lessons. Others contend that scripted direct instruction of this kind strips teachers of creative outlets while undermining accountability. (The contention that teachers cannot legitimately be held accountable when they are only doing exactly what they are told.)

Schools are not just compromised by bad ideas and dubious theories. They can also be undermined by crowding, inadequate facilities and lack of commitment. In a *Washington Post* article, "Educators, Parents See Magnets Flaws," David Nakamura describes how Flintstone Elementary and 27 sister magnet schools struggle against such odds to attain the somewhat contradictory goals of racial integration, academic rigor, and curricular variety.

One of the many pressures that Flintstone faces is its size. For all the attention being paid to smaller classes, little has been focused on school size. In "Students do Better in Small Schools, so Why Have We Been Making Schools Bigger?" Philip Langdon, writing in the *American Enterprise*, makes a persuasive argument that smaller schools can help cure many of the ills others try to solve by adjusting curricula.

***Educational Leadership*, November 1999**

Constructing Knowledge, Reconstructing Schooling

Note: "Constructing Knowledge, Reconstructing Schooling," by John Abbott and Terence Ryan, outlines the major principles of Constructivism. It is one in a group of articles printed in the November 1999 issue of Educational Leadership. We recommend the entire issue to anyone interested in a fuller understanding of this topic.

The emerging brain research that supports constructivist learning collides head-on with many of our institutional arrangements for learning.

Like many adults, I was slow in coming to terms with using the computer. It was not so for my then 9-year-old eldest son, Peter, who, from the moment he had a home computer, quickly learned to manage an increasing range of sophisticated programs. He either taught himself or learned to solve problems by working them out with friends. At an early stage, teachers asked for his help as his school acquired more computers.

A common enough story, repeated time and time again: Young people learn a tremendous amount when deeply engaged in tasks that fascinate them.

A year or so later my second son, David, three years younger than Peter, decided that he, too, wanted to use the computer. At first, Peter was immensely patient as a teacher, and David learned fast. But then I noticed something curious. Peter sensed that David was coming to rely too much on him to explain new processes, instead of using what he already knew to find the answer for himself. One evening, Peter's frustration erupted:

> Dad, David is just being lazy; by asking me to tell him what to do, he will never learn to solve problems for himself. That's the only reason that I know what to do—because I had to work it out for myself. If David doesn't learn to work it out like that, then he'll never really learn!

That sage observation came from an 11-year-old who had never heard of constructivism, but who understood exactly that by bringing all his previous experience to bear on a new problem, he could construct his own novel solutions. As a boy, Peter learned to listen intently to everything that he heard and to note everything that he saw because he realized at a profound level that it was he alone who could direct his own learning.

This anecdote bears out the truth shown in recent long-term research studies—that four of the greatest predictors of eventual success at the university level are achieved before a child even enters school: namely, the quantity and quality of discussion in the child's home, the clarity of value systems, the level of peer group support, and the amount of independent reading (Abbott & Ryan, 1999).

Inquisitiveness is what drives children's learning, and constructivism is the theory that cognitive scientists have devised to explain how an individual progresses from inquisitiveness to new knowledge. Just how does this work?

Constructivism and Brain Research

In searching for answers, researchers in the 1990s have uncovered a massive amount of interrelated evidence in the brain sciences, the biological sciences, and even archaeology and anthropology. This evidence is starting to show in considerable detail how humans actually learn. We now can see why learning is much more than just the flip side of good teaching and schooling. Instead of thinking of the brain as a computer, researchers now see it as a far more flexible, self-adjusting entity—a living, unique, ever-changing organism that grows and reshapes itself in response to challenge, with elements that wither if not used.

As scientists study learning, they are realizing that a constructivist model reflects their best understanding of the brain's natural way of making sense of the world (Feldman, 1994). Constructivism holds that learning is essentially active. A person learning something new brings to that experience all of his or her previous knowledge and current mental patterns. Each new fact or experience is assimilated into a living web of understanding that already exists in that person's mind. As a result, learning is neither passive nor simply objective.

Constructivist learning is an intensely subjective, personal process and structure that each person constantly and actively modifies in light of new experiences. Constructivists argue that by definition, a person who is truly passive is incapable of learning. In constructivist learning, each individual structures his or her own knowledge of the world into a unique pattern, connecting each new fact, experience, or understanding in a subjective way that binds the individual into rational and meaningful relationships to the wider world (Wilson & Daviss, 1994).

Such a view of learning contrasts harshly with the perceived wisdom of many education specialists. A European professor of education recently wrote to us,

> Those involved in school management draw a sharp boundary between the areas of education that are reserved for professionals (for example, teachers), and those in which other members of the community (such as parents or retired people) can legitimately be involved. Although many schools encourage the involvement of members of the community for certain activities, those activities are clearly separated from the "professional" work of teachers. It is very difficult and indeed might well be foolhardy to try to blur this distinction.

In the light of recent research on how children learn, this distinction is now dangerously outdated. As neuroscientists Chang and Greenough noted in 1978, two sets of neurons enable us to learn. One set, they suggested, captures general information from the immediate environment while the other constantly searches through an individual's earlier experiences for meaning. Recent research at the Salk Institute suggests that this is a false dichotomy. Instead of representing two distinct strategies within the brain, these are two separate parts of the same process (Quartz & Sejnowski, 1997). Constructivist learning is the dynamic interaction between the environment and the individual brain.

The Community's Role in Constructivist Learning

In a constructivist model of learning, nature and nurture don't compete; they work together. We humans are who we are largely because of our species' experience over millions of years. Each new generation has a powerful toolkit of predispositions that help explain our ability to learn language, cooperate successfully in groups, think across problems, plan for the future, and empathize with others. Predispositions, both in young children and adolescents, provide individuals with a whole range of skills that enable them to relate flexibly to their environment. Yet, because for most of human history people tended to live in relatively small groups, individuals must develop these skills collaboratively; few individuals ever possess all these attributes.

The speed with which our inherited predispositions evolve is incredibly slow. Researchers think that there have been no major changes in brain structure during the last 30,000 years. Within a single generation, the influences of millions of years of human development mingle with the priorities of a particular culture. As Nigel Nicholson stated, "You can take man out of the Stone Age, but you can't take the Stone Age out of man" (1998, p. 135). We are enormously empowered by an array of predispositions that enable us to adapt to vastly different circumstances, yet these predispositions inhibit us as well.

As we learn more about the brain and how it naturally learns, we must devise learning environments that go with the grain of the brain. We are now in a far better position to understand that "grain." Psychobiologist Henry Plotkin aptly summarizes the relationship between nature and nurture: "Nature has itself evolved. Nurture can only be fully understood in light of historical causes. Nature has nurture" (1997, p. 19). This goes a long way toward explaining just why humans learn the way they do.

The balance between emotion and logic, the role of intuition, and the relationship between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are all part of the "complex adaptive system" that best describes the brain's ability to deal with the messiness of ordinary life situations. By drawing on the full range of a learner's experience, constructivist learning strengthens the individual's ability both to find novel connections and to harness peripheral perception (Bruner, 1974). Rather than a focus on intense, encyclopedic recall, constructivist learning leads to deep understanding, sense-making, and the potential for creativity and enterprise (Kalbfleisch, 1999).

This is where it all becomes fascinating—and essentially hopeful. Research from the biological sciences shows the innate nature of these collaborative higher-order skills and attitudes. With appropriate stimulation at an early age (as would have been the case in pre-Industrial times), young people quickly develop these skills. Children are born with latent predispositions, equipping them to function successfully as part of a community. However, during much of this century, formal schooling has struggled, absent the support of the larger community, to provide appropriate simulation of real-life situations. Thus, schools have met with only limited success.

The reason for this from a constructivist perspective is all too obvious. Such limited learning environments stretch only part of young people's intellectual and social predispositions. For all those who have been able to succeed in the decontextualized setting of the school, there are as many for whom schooling has had very little impact. These children are the ones who often feel school, and indeed society, has no place for them.

New Questions for School Reform

We must now ask deeper questions about the institutions of schooling than have so far been raised in the school reform movement, with its short-term panaceas of more accountability, site-based management, standardized tests, prescribed curriculums, and longer hours for teachers and students. We have to accept that we are dealing with a deep systemic crisis. Constructivism collides head-on with so many of our institutional arrangements for learning.

It is a cruel twist of history that systems set up with the noblest of intentions can, over the course of time and changing circumstances, create the next generation of problems. Isn't this what educators are now grappling with? Isn't it because we have long misunderstood the nature of early learning that we now have such difficulty in secondary education with bored and disillusioned adolescents? Doesn't this misunderstanding explain why the conventional reaction of teachers to such criticism has been to assume additional responsibilities that are surely more appropriately undertaken by parents and community? Are we not stuck with an education system that has progressively turned childhood into an extended virtual holiday and has shut the classroom door on the world of adult affairs and social responsibility?

Neurology's emerging understanding of adolescence suggests that we are trivializing the energy and the idealism of young people at the very stage when they need support and encouragement to learn to mediate and direct their energies and emotion. The truth is, we can't bring children up to be intelligent in a world that does not seem intelligible to them.

Only recently, however, has it become possible to put all the pieces of this argument together. The learning theory that dominated education in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was generally behaviorist: People expected rewards to do tasks; their brains were blank sheets awaiting instruction; and intelligence was innate and largely inherited. As rapidly industrializing nations created education systems for the masses, these systems reflected the industrial factory model. When universities gave advice on the curriculum, they suggested a highly reductionist model of learning. To such early educational experts, the study of learning was a strictly academic affair. They measured what happened in classrooms when people performed abstract tasks, but they hardly ever deigned to study the calculating ability of a working apprentice or a street trader.

It is true that this late 19th century compromise among the scientific understandings of the day, the needs of industry, and the desire to give all children basic skills increased productivity and lifted standards of living significantly. But this came at a cost. Deep down, many children became frustrated, with so many of their predispositions stifled by the routine of instruction. The daily challenge of making sense of their environment had been replaced by a dull recognition of waiting to be told what to do and how to do it.

Considering Student Development

Everything that we understand about our intellectual development suggests that before the age of 7 or 8—particularly before the age of 3—we are heavily dependent on external encouragement and stimulation to develop the ability to collaborate and to see across issues. If such skills are not stimulated at an early stage, then learning them later on is simply far more difficult. In late 20th century terms, the functional skills of reading, writing, and numeracy also fit into the category of survival skills. At an early stage of life, every youngster needs to make great demands on adults if he or she is to master these basic survival skills. Good parenting is essential to the development of a child's mental faculties and social skills.

The natural tendency of young people when they begin puberty is to reverse their dependency on adults. They want to be in control, hormonal changes are pressing them to show that they can now use what they learned earlier to become fully functional, independent people. If they do not have basic survival skills, adolescents are desperately ill prepared to deal with the physiological changes of adolescence. They end up mentally, emotionally, and socially adrift.

Consider the current model of schooling. In many countries, elementary school children are in large, impersonal classes when their predispositions are at their most fertile. In secondary schools, we have instructional approaches that clash with the adolescent's increasing wish to be independent. Many adolescents, for the most natural of reasons, get completely turned off by schooling at about age 14 because school simply does not seem real in comparison to the emotionally charged environments that they experience away from school with their peers.

For the brain's predisposition toward constructivist learning to thrive, we must consider all aspects of a child's learning environment. Constructivism is open-ended, as is the neural structure of the brain. Education that focuses on specific outcomes and national curriculum targets does not support genuinely creative or entrepreneurial learners. An ever-increasing pace of change has made the ability to learn far more important than any particular skill set.

Toward Dynamic Learning

The territory between the schools and the community presents difficulties for many policymakers and the general public. More people now recognize that a dynamic form of learning such as constructivism requires strong partnerships among all those who help children learn and grow. Yet, professional educators and community leaders still do not fully understand this "middle ground" that incorporates the home, the school, and the community and is sometimes facilitated by new technologies.

There is an irony in all this. Those people most actively challenging the protected and isolated nature of current educational arrangements are those who are often the greatest proponents of education focused on outcomes. Those who most strongly support the concept of constructivism are those with unlimited faith in public education, and they often are least prepared to recognize the need for major institutional change.

We call for an organized middle way. To repeat—constructivism is not only an open-ended form of learning, it is essentially about reality, connectivity, and the search for purpose. Growing evidence suggests that a constructivist form of learning matches the brain's natural learning patterns. Constructivist learning dictates that learning arrangements must move beyond what occurs in a classroom; it requires a whole new understanding of a learning community—and that involves everyone, not just teachers. Constructivism provides the debating points for those involved in education reform and those responsible for the revitalization of communities. ■

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The New York Times, November 7, 1999

Summerhill Revisited

By ALAN RIDING
Leiston, England

IN A DAMP AND WINDY CORNER OF EASTERN England, a large run-down Victorian mansion stands as an unlikely monument to a revolutionary idea in education. It was here in the 1920's that a Scottish teacher founded Summerhill as the first modern "free school," where classes were not compulsory and key decisions were made by an assembly of pupils and teachers. The objective was even more unorthodox: that children should be happy at school.

It proved to be a powerful idea that challenged the authoritarian tradition of British schooling and appealed to anti-establishment intellectuals. In the 1960's, Summerhill became a role model for alternative education in the United States, and to this day, the prolific and passionate writings of its founder, A. S. Neill, are studied widely by progressive educators.

Yet, 26 years after Neill's death, the school is largely forgotten in Britain. Or, rather, it was until last spring, when the British government threaten-ed to close it after inspectors from the Office for Standards in Education, or Ofsted, concluded that "Summerhill is not providing an adequate education for its pupils." Suddenly it was back in the news. It had last been featured in London tabloids in 1992, when a television documentary showed teachers and pupils swimming naked together. This year, newspapers have had fun with headlines like "Kool Skools Rool O.K.?" and references to "Lord of the Flies" aplenty.

But if Summerhill is used to controversy, the recent Ofsted report was cause for particular alarm, because it attacked the school's defining policy of allowing children to decide whether they wanted an education. "The school has drifted into confusing educational freedom with the negative right not to be taught," the report said. "As a result, many pupils have been allowed to mistake the pursuit of idleness for the exercise of personal liberty."

This verdict did not come out of the blue. Ofsted inspectors have been dissatisfied since at least 1990. Traditionally, British schools have been reviewed every five years or so, but inspections as a whole have become tougher and more frequent since 1997, when Prime Minister Tony Blair's Labor government took office, pledging to raise educational standards across Britain.

A spokeswoman for Britain's Department for Education and Employment said that the Secretary of State, David Blunkett, had a duty to ensure that children were safe and being educated. She added, "He has said that he cannot allow what is happening at Summerhill to continue."

Now Summerhill is fighting for its life under the command of Zo Readhead, Neill's daughter, a lanky farmer's wife of 53 who attended Summerhill in her father's day. Ms. Readhead has turned her modest office at the school into battle headquarters, where she sells T-shirts and coffee mugs to raise money for the cause, and lobbies parents, alumni and politicians for support. She has appealed three of the government's six complaints to an autonomous government agency, the Independent Schools Tribunal, which is to meet in February. If she loses, she plans to carry the fight to England's courts. If frustrated again, she says she will turn to the European Commission for Human Rights.

The perils of defying the government are very real. A formal letter from the Registrar of Independent Schools addressed to Ms. Readhead as the proprietor warned that Summerhill might be struck off the official register if her appeal is rejected and she fails to carry out the "remedies"—improved accommodation and "efficient and suitable instruction"—that have been demanded by the government. "The penalties for conducting an independent school which is not on the register," the letter added darkly, "are set out in Section 39 of the Criminal Justice Act 1982."

Still, for the moment, daily school life seems largely unaffected. One drizzly morning in late September, the pupils, in their baggy jeans and loose sweaters, were doing what they normally did: hammering in the woodworking room, playing with computers, even going to class. Set in four acres of woodland a few miles from the North Sea, the school has a main building surrounded by cabins and one mobile home, which are used as classrooms and sleeping quarters, and which the inspectors complained were "very basic." (The report also noted that sharing toilets by boys, girls and staff members contravened government regulations, and that some floors had "dangerous" holes in them. The holes, it turned out, were not too large.)

Despite the somewhat crude conditions, the children seemed cheerful enough.

"I hated state school," said Alexander Coad, a boisterous 14-year-old whose home is in Ipswich nearby. "At first, I was really scared here. But once you get settled, it's very friendly." His sentiment was echoed by John Benneworth, 11, who came here last year after he received a diagnosis of dyslexia. "In primary school, they did things I didn't want to do, like tests," he said softly. "Here they don't make you do things. I like that."

Many of the children seem remarkably self-assured perhaps because of the twice-weekly gatherings of students and teachers—one a democratic assembly, the other a "tribunal" to deal with disciplinary questions—where they learn to speak up. At one recent hourlong assembly, sternly presided over by Daniel Kaburger, a 14-year-old German student, debates were followed repeatedly by votes—on whether machetes could be carried around the school, on whether a classroom and teacher should be assigned for late-evening homework, on whether everyone should be obliged to see an antismoking video. Young Daniel even chastised a teacher for being late.

Considering its fame, the school seems small, with just 59 boys and girls ranging in age from 6 to 17, all but 11 boarders—well below what Ms. Readhead considers the ideal: 75. But Summerhill may well be Britain's most international school: there are 18 British pupils, 14 Germans, 10 Japanese, 6 Taiwanese, 4 Koreans, 3 Americans, 2 Swiss, 1 French and 1 Israeli. A Japanese edition of Neill's most influential book, "Summerhill School: A New View of Childhood," and at least four Summerhill-inspired schools in Japan explain why, at one time, half the pupils came from there. Although Summerhill has a Japanese teacher and offers classes in French and German, English is the lingua franca.

The school's nationality breakdown clearly underlines the lack of interest in alternative education in Britain.

That is not surprising. When Neill founded Summerhill in 1921, teaching in Britain was infamously repressive. In fact, it was Neill's own unhappy childhood and early teaching experience in Scotland—under the tutelage of his father, a stern, puritanical schoolmaster in the village of Forfar—that inspired him to find a way of "liberating" children. But today, Neill's philosophy is overpowered by the marketplace, in which the aim is to raise standards by stimulating competition among schools. To do so, the government issues school performance tables based on results in annual nationwide examinations, which newspapers publish in order of excellence. All of which leads to the prevailing equation: good results equal good colleges equal good jobs. Few parents, it seems, are ready to experiment with their children's education.

In contrast, alternative education has always stirred interest in the United States, where there has been a sharp increase in home schooling and even "unschooling," in which home-schooled children can choose their own curriculum. Dozens of "free schools," like the Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, Mass., have adapted Neill's ideas.

"The British have always been the least interested in Summerhill," said Ms. Readhead, who took over the school when her mother, Ena, retired in 1985. (Her father died in 1973.) "I think the ideal for many people is a school with Summerhill's philosophy but one where kids have to attend classes. But this is the raw edge of our approach. You have to be prepared to stand back and watch a kid take another path."

Neill himself set little store in formal education. "Personally, I do not know what type of teaching is carried on, for I never visit lessons, and have no interest in how children learn," he wrote in a typically provocative vein. The freedom to skip classes, though, was a consequence of his fundamental view that, left to their own devices, children find their own ways of learning, and eventually derive pleasure from doing so. It is that view that Ms. Readhead is unwilling to abandon.

"You're free to do as you like as long as it doesn't interfere with anyone else's freedom," she said. "Neill's basic idea was that kids should be treated as human beings, that their emotional and social life was as important as their education."

The Ofsted report, which was based on a five-day visit in March by eight of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, nonetheless zeroed in on the lack of regular class attendance. "Whether the pupils make sufficient progress and achieve the standards of which they are capable is left to each child's inclination," the report stated. "As a result, those willing to work achieve satisfactory or even good standards, while the rest are allowed to drift and fall behind." But the remarks follow a disclaimer: "This report cannot and does not pass judgment on the unique philosophy on which Summerhill is founded."

Similarly, in response to protest letters about the threat to Summerhill from the school's defenders, Mr. Blunkett, the secretary of state, has stated that "we are not requiring Summerhill to abandon its educational philosophy and force children to attend all lessons and follow particular educational courses."

But for Ms. Readhead and her supporters, this is precisely the government's objective. In a heated response, which was posted on the school's Web site and will serve as the basis of the appeal in February, Ms. Readhead called the report's style and language "emotive and unprofessional" and its contents "biased and prejudicial."

"Ofsted has its role and place in the educational system," she wrote. "It should not be allowed to bully those who do not agree with it."

Nonattendance, she said, generally occurs at what Neill called "the gang stage" of early adolescence, when children tend to rebel. But as the children's interests become more defined, she noted, they are eager to sign up for classes. "At Summerhill, we have been observing this process for 78 years and find that students do return to learning with fresh interest and enthusiasm as they get older and mature."

Summerhill charges about $10,500 a year, far less than the average $24,000 other private boarding schools in Britain charge. One side effect of its lower fees, however, is high staff turnover because teachers are paid poorly—about $15,000 a year, as well as board and lodging. Those who stay on, on the other hand, are true believers in the school's philosophy of social and emotional development over formal education, and the report found that 75 percent of the teachers were "satisfactory or better."

Paradoxically, the school follows a traditional government-approved curriculum. "We have no new methods of teaching," Neill wrote in a book, "because we do not think that teaching very much matters." Thus, students at a school built around the notion of personal freedom, even to the detriment of learning, must sit for the same examinations as students in more conventional schools. It is by these results that Summerhill is judged by the government.

The school does not prepare pupils for college entry, which in Britain usually requires 18-year-olds to take the so-called "A" level examinations in at least three subjects. Rather, the curriculum here ends with the General Certificate of Secondary Education exams, taken by everyone at age 16 and, in the best schools, involving 9 or 10 subjects. At Summerhill, since students are usually drawn only to the subjects they enjoy, they are more likely to test in only three or four subjects. Thus, if they continue studying with a view to attending college, they have to try to catch up.

It is therefore not surprising that Summerhill does not feature in the performance tables,which tend to list the 500 to 1,000 schools with the best results. Because of insufficient data from the school, the government says it cannot compare Summerhill test scores with the national average, but in 1998, 75 percent of the students who took certificate-qualification exams passed.

"We don't pay attention to the league tables," Ms. Readhead said. "Everyone recognizes that in a school of 60 children, they don't tell you anything. Also, in a school where only one-third of students are British, two-thirds are sitting exams in their second language."

More important to Summerhill, when pupils pursue further studies it is because they are motivated to do so, and therefore have an advantage over their peers. The evidence supporting this is mostly anecdotal. But, with a view to answering Ofsted's criticism, the school is now collecting information on the activities of alumni who have left Summerhill in the last 12 years. Ms. Readhead herself seems to give little importance to higher education: she dropped out of art school and became a horseback-riding instructor before returning to Summerhill. Despite her title as head teacher, she does not teach.

"For me, what's important is who you are, how you feel about yourself, how you feel about your fellow man," she said. "I can put you in touch with a doctor who was here who is no happier than another man doing a part-time job and playing music."

And yet there appears to be no shortage of former Summerhillians who have successful careers, from the actress Rebecca De Mornay to John Burningham, the children's book author and illustrator.

Alex Ruhle umlaut on u , a 29-year-old equity analyst for a hedge fund in New York, was sent to Summerhill at age 9 by his German diplomat parents, who worked in Paris then. "The school in Paris was so strict that I no longer wanted to go," he recalled. "Once I got to Summerhill, I definitely enjoyed it. You have a real sense of freedom to develop what you want." He left with only two general-certificate qualifications, but he promptly collected five more and passed four A-level exams. "I was very motivated, much more than the others," he said. He then attended the University of Sussex and completed an M.B.A. at Baruch College of the City University of New York.

When Martha Neighbor, 39, returned to the United States at age 14 after five years at Summerhill, she had difficulty adjusting to more orthodox schooling, and even dropped out after two years at the University of Arizona. But she has no regrets. "I think academically Neill's theories were right," she said. "Once I found my motivation, I finished well and was very disciplined." Today, with a degree from Hunter College in New York and a master's in art history and museum studies from the University of Southern California, in Los Angeles, she is the managing director of Risa Jaroslow and Dancers, a modern dance troupe in New York.

Still, the experience of these and other alumni may not be considered relevant when the Independent Schools Tribunal hears Summerhill's appeal. By demanding that "the school ensure that all pupils engage regularly in learning," the government seems more intent on attacking the very idea behind Summerhill. Perhaps the only real surprise is the timing of the attack. Summerhill survived the conservative orthodoxy of Margaret Thatcher's long rule. Now, under a Labor government, its days may be numbered.

***Policy Review*, October & November 1999**

The Schools They Deserve

Howard Gardner and the Remaking Of Elite Education

By MARY EBERSTADT

OUR POSTMODERN TIMES, it is often observed, are rough times for orthodox belief. But religious beliefs aren't the only ones being put to the test these days. Certain established secular creeds, too, seem to be taking their lumps.

Consider the ostensible fate of one particularly long-running such orthodoxy, educational progressivism. It is true, of course, that classrooms across the country continue to exhibit progressively inspired practices, from "natural" ways of teaching math to "whole language" rather than phonetic reading methods; true, too, that one of the doctrine's most cherished dicta — its preference for "critical thinking" over what is disdainfully called the "mere" accumulation of facts — is enshrined in the heart of almost every teacher and embedded in textbooks and teaching plans from kindergarten on. All this has long been so, and must bring some consolation to the rank and file.

But it is also true that educational progressivism, in practice and in theory, is fast losing ground. For almost two decades, in fact, that particular set of ideas — grounded in Rousseau, transplanted in America by John Dewey and his followers, and disseminated through the educational establishment by generations of loyal acolytes ever since — has suffered what must only appear to the faithful as one ignominious setback after another.

There was, to begin with, that famous — some would say infamous — 1983 report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, *America at Risk*, documenting the distinct mediocrity of the nation's students and by corollary the impressive failings of its schools. These failings, certain observers were quick to point out, had risen more or less exactly alongside the ascendance of progressive ideas in the public schools. At the same time, and even more annoying to progressives, such critics were turning out to have echoes at the highest levels of politics. After 12 years of Republican governance — including most notably William J. Bennett's tenure as secretary of education — "standards," "testing," "achievement," and other terms regarded by progressives as ideological fighting words were once more in national circulation.

Yet even that much in the way of public criticism, one suspects, could have been comfortably countenanced by the flock; they had, after all, grown accustomed in the course of their long history to challenges from traditionalists of different stripes. But then, as the 1980s wore on into the '90s, came an outpouring of influential books and articles from critics who could not possibly be written off as tools of reaction. Some of these claimed sympathy with progressivism's aims while dissenting from what had been committed in its name. For these critics, what mattered was not the "otherwise unassailable precepts" of progressivism, as the historian Diane Ravitch once put it, but the fact that these precepts had gotten twisted around in practice to become "justification for educational practices that range from the unwise to the bizarre." It was a message that reached an ever-wider audience of the concerned, as the statistics on everything from reading to the SATs piled up worse by the year.

But the harshest blow to progressive ideas, and what ought to have been the most demoralizing, came in the even more unexpected form of the writings of literary scholar E.D. Hirsch. A Gramsci-quoting, self-described political liberal, Hirsch did more than deplore the excesses of progressivist practice; he attacked the creed itself head-on, and on moral grounds to boot. In 1987, his profoundly influential book *Cultural Literacy* argued that progressive ideas in the schools were depriving all students, particularly those least advantaged, of the knowledge required for citizenship and a decent life. Some years later, in *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (1996), Hirsch went even further, arguing in meticulous detail that "the mistaken ideas" of progressivism had led to "disastrous consequences," and that "since mistaken ideas have been the root cause of America's educational problems, the ideas must be changed before the problems can be solved." Whatever the educational establishment may have made of all this was of little moment next to Hirsch's actual resonance with readers across the country. The ideas in his books — along with his Core Knowledge Foundation and its grade-by-grade, content-laden K-6 curriculum — effectively laid the groundwork for what was, and is, an anti-progressive educational counterculture.

Nor is that all. What must have been even more galling to progressives, priding themselves as they do on the tradition's claim to speak for the common man, is that during the same years in which their creed itself was being thrashed in the middle and higher reaches of public opinion, millions of people who had never even heard of Rousseau or Dewey turned out to be busily repudiating their legacy down below. This is the real meaning of what is often referred to as "the ferment in American schools." For almost two decades now, alarmed by all the same things that alarmed the authors and readers of *America at Risk*, parents and school boards across the country have seized on one educational experiment after another in the hopes of improving the schools — experiments that by their very design send shudders through the enlightened heirs of Dewey.

Many districts and states, for example, have opted for mandatory standardized testing. They have, further, adjusted the curriculum to cover the contents of those exams — in the deploring phrase of progressive educators, "teaching to the test." Other districts are experimenting with financial incentives that these same educators also deplore — merit pay for teachers, school vouchers for disadvantaged families. Some schools have completely reconfigured their courses according to exactly the sort of fact-based learning progressives most heartily oppose; some 400 schools across the country, for example, the vast majority of them public, now claim to be based in whole or in part on Hirsch's Core Knowledge program. Finally, and just as dramatic, is the fact that still other parents have voted for standards and content with their feet by fleeing to the burgeoning rolls of private and parochial schools or — in a phenomenon that progressively-inclined educators barely even mention, so much does it affront their first principles — into the also-burgeoning home school movement, now numbering some one and a half million students.

It is all the more curious, then — it is in fact a puzzle begging for solution — that in the elite circles of higher education where the progressivist tradition still burns bright, the public drubbing their doctrine has endured for nearly two decades now has induced little more than the occasional flinch. In these circles, quite unlike those school districts across the country now noisy with democratic experimentation, an altogether different atmosphere reigns. Here, the very innovations for which many in the public clamor — vouchers, school choice, charter schools, standardized tests, and all the rest — continue to be designated, when they are mentioned at all, as reactionary or nostalgic exercises in discontent. Here, the ideas of the progressive tradition's sharpest recent critics, above all those of Hirsch, continue to be dismissed with genteel contempt. Here, as anyone can see, the long-running doctrine of progressivism continues to reign serenely, exactly as if the rising tide of criticism and the mass defections into enemy territory were not shaking the philosophy's throne to its foundations. All of which suggests that this may be a particularly opportune time to examine what form progressivism now survives in, and the source of that form's appeal.

"First among equals"

LIKE ANY OTHER successful academic orthodoxy, including others that have come to be rejected by the ordinary people in whose name they were devised, the tradition of educational progressivism has never lacked for friends in high places. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that in the professional world of education itself, the doctrine has a near-perfect monopoly on academic prestige. One highly eminent figure in this world is Theodore Sizer, chairman of the Education Department at Brown, whose Coalition of Essential Schools project includes over 200 high schools organized according to progressive principles — student "exhibitions" rather than tests, an emphasis on "habits of mind" rather than accumulation of knowledge, a passion for relevance (one class recently studied *Othello* for its parallels to the O.J. Simpson trial), and so on. Many other figures less well known bring a similar cast of mind to related experiments and projects. And, of course, given the ideological homogeneity of the field, these like-thinking educators often work together, with the largest and most heavily funded of their projects typically collaborative efforts.

Yet if, in this collegial world, a single figure could be said to be "first among equals," as James Traub put it recently in the *New York Times*, or "the premier American scholar addressing educational reform," in the words of the like-thinking Sizer, it would have to be psychologist and celebrity intellectual Howard Gardner — professor of Cognition and Education and adjunct professor of Psychology at Harvard University; adjunct professor of Neurology at the Boston University School of Medicine; co-director since the early 1970s of Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, whose many programs and institutes continue to attract educators from all over; author of some 18 books and hundreds of articles; and recipient of 12 honorary degrees and "many honors," as his latest book jacket copy puts it, including but hardly limited to a 1981 MacArthur fellowship. Gardner's ubiquity both inside the world of education and out almost challenges description. He is a leader in more projects and studies than can be listed here, a steady contributor to tomes from the higher journalism to the specialized literature on down, and a fixture on the lecture circuit (he delivers some 75 talks a year) whose professional interests span everything from classical music to studies of the brain damaged, political advocacy to developmental psychology, oversubscribed teacher workshops at Harvard to a more recent sideline in corporate consulting.

Daunting though it may be to contemplate, this resume does not even begin to convey Gardner's overriding influence in one particular realm of American education, and that is the world of elite private schools. Today, more than any other single figure, he seems poised to leave his stamp on a generation of students at many of the country's most prestigious schools.

Gardner's influence has a surprising history, as he himself has written and other reports agree. In 1983, the story goes, Gardner published what is still his best-known and most influential book, *Frames of Mind*. There, he challenged the professional convention of dividing intelligence into verbal and mathematical forms, and insisted instead on the existence of seven (he would later say eight, and is now equivocating about a ninth) separate "intelligences" of "equal priority," those being the mathematical-logical, linguistic, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Dense and jargon-ridden, as well as mildly esoteric — its main target, as Gardner has written, was Jean Piaget's conception of intelligence as scientific thinking — *Frames of Mind* was executed, and indeed intended, for a limited scholarly audience. "I believed," as the author himself put it later, "that my work would be of interest chiefly to those trained in my discipline, and particularly those who studied intelligence from a Piagetian perspective."

The professional world, for its part, was unconvinced. As Gardner accurately summarized the book's reception later, "a few psychologists liked the theory; a somewhat larger number did not like it; most ignored it." In the *New York Times Book Review*, psychologist George Miller pronounced the theory "hunch and opinion"; in the *New York Review of Books*, meanwhile — where Gardner's own essays on subjects inside and out of his chosen fields are frequently featured — psychologist Jerome Bruner praised the book for its timeliness, but went on to conclude that Gardner's "intelligences" were "at best useful fictions."

And these were just the friendly critics. In *The Bell Curve* (1994), to no one's surprise, Charles Murray and Richard J. Herrnstein dismissed Gardner as a "radical" whose work "is uniquely devoid of psychometric or other quantitative evidence." Yet others with no visible dog in the fight over intelligence turned out to echo the charge. Robert J. Sternberg of Yale observed that "there is not even one empirical test of the theory"; Australian specialist Michael Anderson complained similarly that "the scaffolding is the theory." Though some put their kindest face forward, praising the author of *Frames of Mind* as "brilliant" and his thesis as "original" or "powerful," few of his professional peers would venture, then or since, that anything Gardner was up to amounted to science. Piaget, at least so far as the professional world was concerned, did not stand corrected.

Nonetheless, there was one audience-in-waiting positively electrified by Gardner's message, and it was moreover enthusiastically indifferent to the book's scholarly critics. That audience, as it turned out, came from the ranks of private school administrators and teachers. As Traub put it last year in the opening of another article on Gardner, this one for the *New Republic*, "Howard Gardner first realized that he had struck a chord in the national psyche when he gave a speech to private-school administrators on his new theory of 'multiple intelligences' and saw the headmasters elbowing each other to get into the hall." Gardner himself recalls the moment with dramatic detail in his 1993 *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice*:

> Some months after the publication of *Frames*, I was invited to address the annual meeting of the National Association of Independent [i.e., private] Schools. . . . I expected the typical audience of fifty to seventy-five persons, a customary talk of fifty minutes followed by a small number of easily anticipated questions. Instead . . . I encountered a new experience: a much larger hall, entirely filled with people, and humming with excitement. It was almost as if I had walked by mistake into a talk given by someone who was famous. But the audience had in fact come to hear me: it listened attentively, and grew steadily in size until it spilled into the hallways on both sides of the room. . . . [A]fter the session had concluded, I was ringed by interested headmasters, teachers, trustees, and journalists who wanted to hear more and were reluctant to allow me to slip back into anonymity.

The event that proved a turning point in Gardner's personal life would also mark a turning point for his admirers in the tonier schools. Today, as if in vindication of the judgement of those enthusiasts who catapulted his ideas to celebrity heights, Howard Gardner bestrides their world as no other single influence or figure of inspiration. In addition to his omnipresence on the lecture circuit, Gardner's books and videotapes and software are in constant demand (his CD-ROM tour of the intelligences sells for $435 for a set of five); his workshops for teachers and other educators at Harvard are early sell-outs; and hundreds of schools now claim, in varying degrees, to have remade themselves in keeping with multiple-intelligence theory. And though some of those schools are public — there is no shortage of funders or educators interested in trying Gardner's ideas — there can be no doubt that it is the private school world, today as in 1983, that is clamoring for multiple-intelligence products, paying for Gardneriana, and conforming their classrooms to his dicta. Indeed: In what may be the single most telling detail of Gardner's influence in the world of elite education, Traub reports that "when the directorship of one of New York's most prestigious private schools recently came open, almost every candidate for the job mentioned Gardner in his or her one-page educational-philosophy statement." In sum, as one educator put it to Traub, "Howard is the guru, and *Frames of Mind* is the bible."

Progressivism, properly understood

IF SO, THE HOLY WRIT has now been enlarged once more, and the reader curious as to what the private schools are clamoring for need look no further. For this year Gardner has published yet another book, *The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand* (Simon & Schuster, $25.00). Unlike *Frames of Mind*, which as we have seen reached the general reader only inadvertently, *The Disciplined Mind* takes no such risk; it is overtly aimed at "individuals" — indeed, "individuals all over the world" — who "care about education." Here, the author promises with typical sweep, he "seek[s] to synthesize over thirty years of research in the cognitive and biological sciences, and over fifteen years of involvement in precollegiate education," to find the features of "good educations . . . everywhere in the world."

Somewhat incongruously, progressivism's most visible public defender opts here for an Olympian tone. He is "weary," he explains, "of debates that array one educational philosophy against another." Though it is true, he elaborates later, that "much of what I write about can be identified with the educational tradition of John Dewey — with what has been called progressive or neo-progressive education," it is also true, as he acknowledges, that this tradition has become a code word in the minds of some for low or no standards and poor work. In that sense, Gardner writes, "I reject the baggage that has . . . come to be associated with this label." Contrary to what critics have suggested, "one can be progressive while also espousing traditional educational goals and calling for the highest standards of work, achievement, and behavior." This book, in the author's telling, is a statement of that other progressive philosophy, progressivism properly understood — not the old and tarnished version of yesteryear, but a kind of souped-up version, a muscular version, a kind to which even conservatives and traditionalists, or so the author seems to hope, might warm.

Where does this new progressivism lead? The answer is something of a mystery, at least at first. For Gardner is also "weary," as it turns out, of what he calls the "instrumental or momentary" issues in education today — issues like "vouchers," "charter schools," "teachers unions," "local control," "national standards," "international comparisons," and all the quotidian rest. Such issues, Gardner argues, "skirt the most fundamental question" of the purposes of education itself. These purposes he identifies as a "quartet" across "educational time and space": "to transmit roles; to convey cultural values; to inculcate literacies; and to communicate certain disciplinary content and ways of thinking."

Alongside this quartet of purposes, the author simultaneously outlines a "trio of virtues" that "should animate education" — truth, beauty, and morality — and produces examples of how each of these realms might be approached. To gain an understanding of truth, he suggests, students might study the theory of evolution; of beauty, Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*; and of morality, the Holocaust. These choices, the author readily acknowledges, are "time-bound," "place-bound," and even "personal"; they are not intended to signal a "fixed canon," which the author himself ardently opposes. One could easily substitute other instantiations in their place, he goes on to explain — for example, approaching truth through "folk theories about healing or traditional Chinese medicine," beauty through "Japanese ink and brush painting" or "African drum music," and good and evil through "the precepts of Jainism, the stories of Pol Pot and Mao's Cultural Revolution," or "the generosity of bodhisattvas." The point, it appears, is not to "privilege" any particular set of examples; not one is "sacrosanct," and in any event, Gardner writes, "I do not believe in singular or incontrovertible truth, beauty or morality." "No doubt," the author goes on to acknowledge, "there are various routes" to such understanding (later in the book, he will identify six such "pathways"); the one outlined here is merely his own "preferred path."

Anyone reading this far into his argument may long since have started wondering what a curriculum — to say nothing of a lowly classroom — might look like when cut to the specifications of all these purposes, virtues, and pathways. But the reader must be patient; list-wise, we have only just begun. The Six Forces That Will Remake Schools are easy enough to digest (as is the by-now obligatory point that "changes in our world are so rapid and so decisive that it will not be possible for schools to remain as they were or simply to introduce a few superficial adjustments"). Similarly, the Six "most prominent ideas ushered in by the cognitive revolution" can be managed without headache. So can the Seven "mind and brain findings" that "ought to be kept in mind by anyone concerned with education," off the track of Gardner's main point though they may be.

It is when the author returns to his main subject that the conceptual challenge begins in earnest. For it turns out that there are not only Four Approaches to Understanding ("learning from suggestive institutions," "direct confrontations of erroneous conceptions," "a framework that facilitates understanding," and "multiple entry points"), but that the fourth of these, in keeping with multiple-intelligence theory, is itself subdivided into seven further categories (the entry points in question being narrative, numerical, logical, existential/foundational, aesthetic, hands-on, and interpersonal), *and* that room must be left for metaphor, similes, model languages, and other means of making sense of the consequent "multiple representations of the Core Concept."

What all this means for the classroom is anybody's guess, but what Gardner himself says it means looks something like this: A "narrative entry point" into the subject of evolution, for example, might be the story of Darwin's voyage on the Beagle, or the tale of his fellow evolutionist and grandfather, or the saga of the Galapagos finches. A "numerical entry point" might be a study of the beak size of the same finches. Other entry points might include, say, breeding fruit flies ("hands-on"), watching a documentary ("aesthetic"), or recreating the debates that followed publication of Darwin's theory. Similarly, the *Marriage of Figaro* might be studied via the human struggles it contains (existential-foundational), comparison of meter and rhythm in two arias (numerical), or performing parts of the score (hands-on). As for the Holocaust, one might, say, study the history of artists persecuted under Hitler (aesthetic entry point), read the literature of survivors (existential-foundational), or focus on a specific event such as the Wannsee conference (narrative). A classroom designed by Gardner, in other words, might do all these things — or it might, even more important, do none of the above; we are reminded repeatedly, as he puts it toward the end, that "these choices are illustrative only."

Well, so be it. Now, if the content of such an education is indeed ad hoc, arbitrary, in permanent flux, then we can only evaluate that education by means of its methodology. About that methodology Gardner is quite clear — he favors "depth over breadth," (pursuing a small number of topics rather than conveying large amounts of information); "construction over accumulation" of knowledge (an emphasis on personal questioning rather than memorization); "the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake over the obeisance to utility"; "an individualized over a uniform education" (a preference that allows "the natural inclinations of the human individual to unfold and endure"); and "student-centered" rather than "teacher-centered" education (meaning that students join in the process of "assessing" themselves). Personal relevance, student-led classrooms, hands-on, performance-oriented activities — does any of this sound familiar?

> "Learning by doing" was a central element in the . . . curriculum . . . [as were] educational methods that discarded the mere accumulation of knowledge and made learning a part of each student's life, connected to his or her present situation and needs. These were schools of the future . . . because they exhibited "tendencies toward greater freedom and an identification of the child's school life with his environment and outlook."

The description here comes from Diane Ravitch in *The Schools We Deserve*, and she is quoting John Dewey. The year in question is 1915.

The shock of the old

In sum, the vision on which Gardner insists so passionately in *The Disciplined Mind* is not exactly new. It is, in fact, older than most people now alive, as was demonstrated most elegantly by the progressives' nemesis, E.D. Hirsch, three years ago in *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*. Gardner, of course, is profoundly aware of Hirsch's opposing perspective, which he describes in his latest book as "a view of learning that is at best superficial and at worst anti-intellectual." (That's when Gardner is minding his literary manners. On the lecture trail, he prefers the jab of "Vanna White knowledge.") Yet it is an interesting fact that Gardner, for all that he describes his own latest book as part of a "sustained dialectic — read disagreement," with Hirsch himself, in fact mentions his adversary only a few times, while *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* appears not at all.

Interesting, but not at all surprising. For that last book of Hirsch's, *predating* Gardner's though it did by three years, uncannily provides the intellectual genealogy of just about every tenet of *The Disciplined Mind*, most of them presented by the author as if they were thought up just yesterday.

"Changes in our world are so rapid and so decisive," Gardner's argument begins, "that it will not be possible for schools to remain as they were." "The claim that specific information is outmoded almost as soon as it has been learned," writes Hirsch in *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, "goes back at least as far as [William Hearst] Kilpatrick's *Foundations of Method* (1925)." Subject matter, Gardner argues, should not be "privileged"; what matters is that education be centered on the child rather than the subject. "Dewey's words, disposing of the polarity between child-centered and subject-matter-centered education," Hirsch observes after quoting them, "were published in 1902." What of the concomitant idea — also part of the "child-centered" curriculum — that testing amounts to "spitting back" material, and that children should instead "construct" answers for themselves? "The campaign against giving students tests," Hirsch explains, "is an integral part of a Romantic progressivism that goes back to the 1920s. . . . [O]rthodox educational doctrine since the 1920s has been consistently opposed to testing and grading."

And so on, and on — and on. The superiority of "hands-on" experimentation versus "drill-and-practice" teaching, the importance of "individual differences," "learning styles," and an "active learning environment"? These buzzwords and all they represent, the nuts and bolts of *The Disciplined Mind*'s imagined classroom, turn out to date to an exceedingly influential document published by the Bureau of Education and called *The Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* — published in 1918. The main focus of this document, as it happens, was an attack on the idea — one resonating these 80-plus years later in Gardner's arbitrary trio of evolution, Mozart, and the Holocaust — that subject matter per se should anchor a curriculum. "This hostility to academic subject matter," writes Hirsch, "has been the continued focus of educational 'reform' ever since *Cardinal Principles* — a tradition that needs to be kept in mind when current reformers attack 'mere facts' and 'rote learning.' "

Just as what is significant in *The Disciplined Mind* is not new, so its particular novelty — that architectonic of trios, quartets, sextuplets, and septuplets of principle, intelligences, and entry points and all the rest — is not terribly significant. In fact, the most vaunted part of that architectonic — the identification of the multiple intelligences, and the insistence on a curriculum intended to elicit all of them — is, unfortunately for the rest of Gardner's argument, its weakest link.

Consider only what multiple-intelligence theory forces him to say about one of his own chosen subjects, the teaching of the Holocaust. No one could object to the reading of survivor stories, say, or to an in-depth look at Eichmann's trial in Israel in 1961, or to reviewing the literature on the Wannsee conference. But the insistence that these are mere "entry points" for certain kinds of "intelligences," entry points no more or less "privileged" than any other, will not stand up. It is very difficult to accept that the author himself believes it. After all, the Holocaust could also be "entered" through a study of, say, how concentration camps boosted local employment rates. Would Gardner really sanction that approach, rather than appear to "privilege" conventional sources?

Even worse are the tortured passages where the cumbersome requirements of his theory force him to invent other "entry points" aligned to the more avant-garde "intelligences." It is hard, for example, to read under "interpersonal points of entry" his assurance that "The Holocaust provides many opportunities for role play" without a twinge of uneasiness. Occasionally, one feels the strain of his material stretching round his theory to the ripping point — as in his admission that "when it comes to the relationship between the Holocaust and artistry, one must tread carefully," or in the howler, "Hands-on involvement with the Holocaust must be approached carefully, especially with children." To say that the multiple-intelligences approach runs the risk of trivializing serious subjects — a risk Gardner briefly acknowledges here — is one thing. But to advance beyond those claims about entry points to say that it does not even matter *whether* the Holocaust is taught, much less how, is to enter a zone of relativism where few readers would care to follow. Clearly, Gardner expects good taste to govern the classroom. But this preference must go unspoken, since to introduce it is to open the way to objective "standards" and other rigidities he disavows.

What, finally, of the author's promise to deliver progressivism with a difference? For all the reassurances ("I am a demon for high standards and demanding expectations"), for all the talk of "rigor," "high standards," and the rest, no ways and means are introduced here that would translate these terms into accountability — none, that is, beyond the upholding of "regular assessments," and what that means is anybody's guess. As James Traub put it pointedly in the *New York Times Book Review*, "One would like to ask Gardner, an erudite and wide-ranging thinker, if that was how school equipped his own mind."

Gardner, of course, would protest that such ideas have never really been tried. "Educational experimentation" in this century, he believes, "has occurred chiefly on the margins"; progressive educators "have had relatively little impact on the mainstream of education throughout the contemporary world." The argument that something has never been tried, that last gasp of exhausted ideology, is in this particular case quite wrong; the Everyclass all these educators love to hate — one with "prevalent lecturing, the emphasis on drill, the decontextualized materials and activities ranging from basal readers to weekly spelling tests," as Gardner puts it — has been out of fashion and in many schools stigmatized, apparently without the progressives' ever having noticed it, for decades now. To the extent that it is reviving in American schools today, it is on account not of the establishment educational culture, but of a counterculture that is now declaring, whether overtly like the educational reformers or tacitly through the many experiments now under way in the schools, that a hundred years of progressive experimentation is enough.

To each, according to his means?

IT APPEARS, then, that progressive educational ideology has come full circle. Born near the turn of the century in hopes of raising the downtrodden up, it survives now as the ideology of choice of, by, and for the educational elite.

Indeed, it is increasingly recognized as such. Consider this comment by Nathan Glazer, writing last year in the *New Republic* of the sharply opposed visions of E.D. Hirsch and progressive educator Theodore Sizer. "The question of what's best for the classroom," Glazer concluded, "may simply be a matter of class — social class. In some schools, with some students, one can teach for understanding and depth. . . . For others — frankly and regrettably — there are no such things." Gardner, similarly, for all his talk of an "education for all human beings," notes that "for those disadvantaged children who do not acquire literacy in the dominant culture at home, such a prescribed curriculum [as that recommended by Hirsch and others] helps to provide a level playing field and to ensure that future citizens enjoy a common knowledge base." Progressivism, it appears, is not for the weak — or the backward, or the poor.

So what's in it for the elite — all those headmasters and teachers and parents still elbowing their way into Gardner's lectures? Why the enduring appeal to them of progressive ideas? Three sorts of explanations come to mind.

The first is institutional. The means by which academic ideologies perpetuate themselves have been closely studied elsewhere; the particular case of progressive ideology has probably been explained best, again, by Hirsch in *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*. Almost all the leading figures in the field of education — all the most prestigious institutions — are considered, and consider themselves, heirs to Dewey's tradition. This fact is important. It means, for example, that graduate students seeking out the "best" schools and professors will find themselves educated — and, of course, penalized or rewarded in their professional lives — by people imbued with the ideas that overwhelmingly dominate these schools. It also means that teachers, headmasters, and others who pride themselves on staying au courant will likewise gravitate to the same ideological home base.

A second way of explaining progressivism's latest lease on life is more prosaic, and concerns those on the consumer end of private education. In a review of Gardner and his ideas for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Robert Holland recently quipped that multiple-intelligence theory "encourages the egalitarian delusion that we all are utterly brilliant in equally important ways," thus providing "an escape route from accountability." He is, of course, absolutely right; that "delusion" is the main source of the theory's very human appeal.

On any bell curve, after all, half the results will fall below the norm; *somebody* is going to be in that bottom quintile, or two quintiles, and so on. Now, parents everywhere have a natural aversion to thinking their own child is average or worse; from the parental point of view, as the Russian joke has it, every baby is a "normal genius child." Add to that natural aversion the fact that, at the upper reaches of the private school world, some parents are paying $10,000 to $14,000 a year per child; these sums alone are a powerful disincentive against giving parents bad news. Many parents send their children to private school, after all, precisely so that they do not have to worry about their education. Grades and standardized tests are a constant reminder that problems might still surface at any time. Thus, private school parents, possibly more than others, may be susceptible to multiple-intelligence-style ideas that emphasize the talents of their children, while not putting those talents on the line in any way that will rouse parental concern. There is also, of course, no denying the fact that classrooms like these have always had a certain snob appeal. Grades and tests, they imply, are for the ordinary kids; no means of measurement could do justice to ours.

But there is a larger, more sociological explanation for the success of such a vision in the private schools today, an explanation that ought to make progressives themselves uncomfortable if they ever take occasion to reflect on it. For the fact is that in placing their bets on the most advantaged children — those children of the kind of people who have taken multiple-intelligence theory to heart — progressive educators can hardly lose.

How could they? Teach those children Inuit and Swahili all you like; they, unlike their less advantaged counterparts, will pick up the French or Italian or whatever they need when the time comes for travelling abroad. Withhold from them all that distasteful factual information with no fear of penalty — most of them, again unlike their less fortunate fellows, will pick up the facts from their reading and conversation outside the classroom. Deny them, if you like, geography; they will find, say, Madrid or the Euphrates from the airport when they get there. Refuse to administer tests — excepting of course the intelligence tests so tellingly required by almost every private school in the land — again, with impunity; most of them will have individual tutors for the SAT and AP exams when the time comes.

All of which is to say that when the children of today's Gardner- or Sizer-influenced schools go on from strength to strength later in life, that fact will tell us very little about the intrinsic worth of progressive ideas or the merits of the classrooms where those ideas roam free. All success will prove is that the overwhelming advantages with which most of those students are blessed — the homes packed with books, the money that makes travel and other forms of personal enrichment a fact of life, the literate and high-functioning parents and peers, the expectations and, for many, the genetic advantages with which they are born — amount to more human capital than any classroom, including mediocre and worse ones, can reduce by much.

Viewed this way, the revival of progressive ideas among elite schools and students may seem a harmless enough experiment; and so, from the perspective of those particular individuals, it probably is. All the same, this ideological renascence has its dark side. The more the private schools tack to the wind — abolishing grades, eradicating tests, and otherwise disposing of the instruments that have traditionally allowed worse-off students the means by which to elevate themselves — the harder it will become for any child to join those schools except through accident of birth.

After all, they will not be able to join them by dint of hard work; the curriculum is constantly in flux, so there is nothing to prepare for. Nor will their graded schoolwork elsewhere grant them entrée; this merely proves they have been "force-fed" facts. As for more subjective measures, like a teacher's recommendation — well, that teacher was almost certainly not trained according to theory; she probably just was "privileging" certain kinds of performance in the usual suspect way. The school without recognizable assessments and a fixed curriculum — the school of which progressive educators, today or yesterday, continue to dream — is a school stripped of handholds from below.

As for the poor and disadvantaged themselves — well, as enlightened voices are now saying, let them have Hirsch. Come to think of it, the implied contest there has a certain charm. Let the games begin.

The Christian Science Monitor, October 26, 1999

IF IT'S TUESDAY (IN CHICAGO), IT MUST BE POLYGONS

By Abraham McLaughlin, Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

There's a new military-style order being injected into Chicago public schools - and it includes just about everything but the jack boots and kevlar helmets.

In the nation's boldest experiment in building more structure into the classroom, administrators here are giving teachers a regime of strict marching orders that spells out exactly what, when, and how to teach.

To be sure, the regime is voluntary - teachers aren't drafted into it. But once they sign up, they're given a schedule of Pattonesque precision. If it's day No. 8 of the school year, Algebra 1 students discover polygons. If it's day No. 21, first-graders use sugar cubes to learn about geology. And so on. Every lesson in every grade spelled out with specifics.

Called a "structured curriculum," the idea is to ensure a basic level of quality in chaotic urban public schools. But critics say the approach, taken too far, turns teachers and students into automatons - and stifles creativity. Is this school or boot camp?

The idea grows out of the "accountability" or "standards" movement sweeping American education. Nationwide, districts are tightening the reins on teachers. But Chicago has gone the farthest.

"Chicago leads the parade on this one," says Chris Pipho, an analyst at the Education Commission of the States in Denver. But "the standards movement is putting the screws on people to produce, so we may see more of this as the movement continues to kick in."

One school that's fully embracing the idea is the Harold Washington Elementary School deep in Chicago's South Side. In a desert of potholed streets, worn houses, and sinking poverty, this place is a brick-solid oasis of order and discipline. Principal Sandra Lewis insists on it.

While the 750 uniformed students move through the halls, they must stand quietly in line with their arms crossed over their chests (so they can't tweak their classmates). Every teacher - new or old - must use the new curriculum or give Dr. Lewis an alternate lesson plan. "I don't want to have soldiers, but I sure do want order," Lewis says.

When the structured curriculum was offered as a pilot program last year, she jumped at it. Over the years, she says, the many swirling educational-reform movements have muddied what exactly a teacher is supposed to teach. "What can I expect to have her cover?" asks Lewis. "Before this, who knew?"

Indeed, the lesson plans - written by 100 of the city's top teachers - set out specific skills students should learn. Those skills are linked to the standardized tests students will take. And the tests aim to cover all the basic skills a child needs. So, in theory, if a teacher covers each skill in the curriculum, students will learn everything they need to know.

One major criticism, however, is that it sucks all creativity out of teaching. "It assumes a kind of factory mentality" in which teachers treat kids "like widgets," says Jacqueline Ancess of the National Center for Restructuring Education Schools and Teaching at Columbia University in New York.

But Paul Vallas, chief executive of the nation's third-largest school district, argues the realities of an urban system demand some standardization. He hires 1,500 new teachers a year who may need help getting up to speed. Also, up to 10 percent of teachers are teaching out of their specialty area. And up to 7 percent of teachers are substitutes. Others are burned out or overwhelmed or both.

All these teachers need help, he says. And in corporate America or in the military, these kinds of employees would get help. "Only in public education," he says, "do we rarely give teachers standards or help on instructional methods and then say, 'OK, go to it.' "

Others worry Mr. Vallas is undermining his nationally recognized efforts to hold teachers accountable - to set high standards and reassign or fire those who don't measure up. "You can't hold someone accountable if you tell them what to do every minute of the day," says Michael Petrilli, program director at the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Washington. He worries teachers will say, "You can't fire me, I used your curriculum."

Vallas says he's willing to take that risk. So what do people in the trenches think? Many are lukewarm. "We take our jobs much too seriously" to rely on it completely, says Emil DeJulio, a principal on Chicago's North Side.

But at Harold Washington, where 26 of 31 teachers have been on the job for less than two years, most say they love it (even out of Lewis's earshot). "It's a skeleton we can build our lessons onto," says first-grade teacher Daniel Baker. It allows teachers to "go step by step or be creative."

In a recent science lesson, for instance, the curriculum directed teachers to teach about solids and liquids. Mr. Baker had his kids make ice cream, turning liquid milk into solid dessert. It wasn't in the curriculum, but it covered the bases. So Baker was happy. Lewis was happy. And the kids? They ate it up.

The Washington Post, **November 23, 1999**

Educators, Parents See Magnets' Flaws

Pr. George's Looking for Remedies

By David Nakamura
Washington Post Staff Writer

Walk into a Montessori class at Flintstone Elementary and you'll see many of the hallmarks of that program: students of various ages working by themselves or in small groups and using blocks and beads instead of textbooks.

But you'll also see many things that conflict with the Montessori approach. Announcements over a loudspeaker distract students from their work, portable classrooms leave pupils no room to spread out and no running water is available for hands-on science experiments. And while the Montessori method suggests having music, computer and gym in succession, those classes are broken up with academic lessons.

The problem, parents and educators at the Prince George's County school say, is that the school is not committed to the Montessori approach. Only about half of the 683 students are enrolled in the program, which was created 13 years ago to help encourage integration at the predominantly African American school. The other half are taught the county's regular academic curriculum in more traditional classroom settings

With two distinctly different academic philosophies under the same roof, it's only natural that they would conflict, parents say. Furthermore, growing enrollment has contributed to severe crowding, forcing Flintstone's computer, music and art rooms to be converted into classrooms.

"You do not have a pure Montessori. You have a hybrid. There are too many variables, and you have an administration not familiar with the program," said Russell Butler, one of the parents who want all Montessori students grouped in their own schools.

That is one of the many options school officials will be considering over the next six months as they try to determine how to revamp the county's 28 elementary magnet schools. A recent report by a school system task force found that many are falling short of their goals.

The school system founded the magnet programs to encourage integration and offer students a choice of curricula, many with more-rigorous academics. But the report said 11 of the schools have not attracted enough white students to meet their racial goals and nine do not teach the specialized curricula they advertise.

And while the magnet schools generally posted higher averages on state exams than non-magnets, researchers concluded that was primarily because students with higher academic ability entered the programs.

Superintendent Iris T. Metts and school board members say they are committed to magnet schools as a way to continue encouraging integration as the system phases out 25 years of court-ordered busing. But they also promise to place a greater emphasis on academic achievement.

"The purpose is no longer the same," Metts said. "We have to make sure the schools are accountable and . . . meet their academic goals."

Parents, teachers and administrators say many magnet schools must overcome myriad problems: crowded classrooms, a lack of adequately trained teachers, a deemphasis of the specialized curriculum in favor of instruction geared toward the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP) tests and inadequate support and commitment from the central office.

Perhaps most affected are the county's six traditional academies and academic centers, which offer more rigorous academics, including Latin, and stronger discipline, sometimes including uniforms.

At Middleton Valley Elementary in Temple Hills, the orderliness of the building is noticeable. Boys in uniform navy slacks and ties and girls in plaid skirts are quiet and well behaved as Principal Deborah J. Moore walks through the building doing a "necktie check."

But peek inside the classrooms, and some of the problems that have contributed to low test scores become clear.

For example, the school's fourth-, fifth- and sixth-grade classes all have 34 to 39 students. Some must share terminals in the computer lab, which has only 33 workstations. Moore said that she would like to add two teachers to help relieve the crowding but that the central administration has not been able to find candidates.

Cynthia Mason-Posey, whose sixth-grade daughter is in a class of 38 students, is outraged that a school that is supposed to offer more rigorous academics does not have enough teachers.

"We're extremely unhappy. We don't know what to do," said Mason-Posey, who has considered sending her daughter to private school. "The [school] Web site says they offer Latin, but they get it one hour a week from a part-time teacher. It's idle promises."

Teachers are not the only resource in short supply. The task force report found that the cash-strapped school system had not adequately updated technology in the communications and the science and technology magnet schools.

"I've always said that magnets

cannot succeed in an underfunded school system," said school board Chairman Alvin Thornton (Suitland), who helped develop them.

In addition, some parents and principals say an increasing focus on state test scores has undercut the once-unique curricula of some magnet programs such as the talented and gifted magnets and traditional academies.

"If you're truly committed to magnets, then the system has to allow some more flexibility and freedom for magnets to do what they're supposed to do," said Joan Roache, a parent and member of the task force that wrote the magnet report.

And the most successful magnet programs, such as French immersion and creative and performing arts, often are heavily supported by parents who volunteer and help fund the programs.

For example, Rogers Heights Elementary in Bladensburg offers a French immersion program that is among the most popular and successful magnets in the county.

About half the school's students are in the magnet program, but their parents raise money that helps fund field trips for *all* students. The parents also run after-school tutoring and computer classes and oversee clubs for art, music, chess and drama, which all students can join.

"When we go on field trips, we have more French immersion parents than we need," said Kona-Facia Freeman-Nepay, a fourth-grade teacher.

Remarkably, the school is one of the most crowded in the county, with 11 portable classrooms. But the principal has been able to hire more teachers to reduce class sizes in part because she does not fear hiring uncertified teachers.

Most of the French immersion teachers come from French-speaking nations and do not have U.S. teaching certificates, said Francis Renson, the magnet coordinator.

Parents support that philosophy and say the teachers' diverse backgrounds help their children learn the French language and culture more quickly.

"The program deliberately seeks people who are native speakers of French, as this is one of the academic and cultural strengths of the program," said Ann Davidson, whose daughter placed first in a national French competition last year.

Still, Davidson believes one way to improve academic performance in magnet programs is to set academic admissions standards. Only the talented and gifted program has such criteria. Admission to other magnet programs is based on race, to promote diversity within schools, and students are selected by lottery.

The lottery system has been complicated in recent years by the changing demographics of the county. Today, 76 percent of the student body is African American, and many black students remain on waiting lists as schools seek nonblack students to fill the slots.

Metts and school board members said they may develop a new system that would give students of all races greater access to magnet programs.

"The demographics of the county have changed dramatically from the time the federal court got involved," Metts said. "If you are going to have a multicultural goal for magnet schools, you have to reexamine it in terms of the current population makeup."

The American Enterprise, January/February 2000

Students do better in Small Schools

So why have we been making schools bigger?

By Philip Langdon

One of the most dubious educational campaigns of modern times was the long-running effort to consolidate many small schools into centralized large schools. I know because I attended a small school that was wiped away by consolidation fever. I also know because I've spent recent weeks reading the increasingly plentiful research showing that small-school students do better than big-school students in almost every way.

In June 1965, 58 other seniors and I walked onto the stage of northwestern Pennsylvania's Wesleyville High School to accept our diplomas. The following year a consolidated institution, Iroquois Area High School, opened in the neighboring Lawrence Park Township, and Wesleyville's building was demoted to an elementary school. Gone was the home of the Bulldogs, for decades a source of pride and unity among the 3,000-plus inhabitants of our one-square-mile borough.

Wesleyville's history stretched back to about 1810, when religious-minded people named their settlement near the south shore of Lake Erie for John Wesley, founder of Methodism. By 1850 concern among residents about moral issues ran so strong that Wesleyville became a station on the Underground Railroad, helping runaway slaves escape across the lake to Canada.

In 1959, when my family enrolled me in sixth grade, Wesleyville, just eight blocks wide and 11 blocks long, had been overshadowed by the adjacent city of Erie, a manufacturing center that blessed the world with Kold-Draft beer coolers, Hammermill paper, General Electric locomotives, Marx toys, Bucyrus-Erie construction equipment, and the output of an untold number of tool-and-die shops. Wesleyville was still, however, a lively little place containing about two dozen small, locally owned stores, eight or ten eating and drinking establishments, four churches, a movie theater, a creek, a dump, a trailer park with drives named Fleetwood and Ventoura, an assortment of closely spaced houses—and one school. The sober, two-story red brick school stood on leafy Willow Street smack in the center of the borough, summoning youngsters from kindergarten all the way up through twelfth grade. Children walked to school in the morning, walked home for lunch, walked back for afternoon sessions, then walked home again when classes were over.

But the Cold War provided a formidable rationale for doing away with such schools. Harvard President James Bryant Conant, leader of the campaign to abolish small schools (especially high schools that graduated under 100 students a year), asserted that Americans who resisted consolidation were "still living in imagination in a world which knew neither nuclear weapons nor Soviet imperialism." Declared Dr. Conant darkly: "They believe they can live and prosper in an isolated, insulated United States." His arguments, which brought to culmination a long history of progressive thinkers' attacks on small schools, helped spur state governments into closing great numbers of schools and herding the students into bigger institutions with more modern equipment and more advanced curricula.

There was just one problem: Students do not actually fare better in big schools. At Wesleyville, where the final, 59-person Class of 1965 was by local standards a *big* class (the pre-baby boom Class of '61 numbered just 32), students knew one another's names, personalities, and often their families, religious affiliations, and other attributes. At Wesleyville no one got lost in the crowd, not even those who considered themselves "loners," like Bill Wittenberg. Wittenberg, a 1964 graduate who now manages the borough government, says the school's intimate atmosphere helped him immeasurably. "Being able to walk down the hall and say, 'Hi, Lynn, hi, Terry' bolstered my spirit, my self-confidence," he recalls. "I had the opportunity of knowing everybody in the classes I was in as a senior and of knowing most of the school's students all the way down to seventh grade."

The recent mass murders in American high schools have demonstrated that adolescents' state of mind is important. School massacres have been disproportionately a large-institution phenomenon. Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado, where a pair of students killed 13 others and then themselves, had an enrollment of 1,965. Thurston High School in Springfield, Oregon, where a 15-year-old boy shot 24 students, had 1,500. Research since the mid-1980s has consistently found that big schools exacerbate antisocial tendencies. "Behavior problems are so much greater in larger schools that any possible virtue of larger size is canceled out by the difficulties of maintaining an orderly learning environment," education researchers Jean Stockard and Maralee Mayberry declared in a 1992 study.

It isn't just horrendous events like school shootings that should be of concern. What matters is the ability to form satisfying relationships. Thirty years ago approximately 40 percent of Americans considered themselves shy, according to Philip Zimbardo, founder of shyness research at Stanford University. Today about 50 percent say they're shy. Most likely this rising social discomfort stems from daily life's having become more isolating and impersonal. Youths have their own bedrooms, their own TV sets, and detached pursuits such as computers, and they have less meaningful contact with parents, aunts, uncles, and local people. Small schools—such as high schools with no more than 100 students per grade level—are valuable in part because they provide a setting full of familiar faces, an encouraging environment for learning social skills and community responsibilities.

Ironically, one argument for consolidation was the array of extracurricular activities big schools could offer: more clubs, more sports, more choices. Unfortunately, experience proves that as school size grows, the rate of participation drops. Just try to become a cheerleader or a basketball player in a school of 2,000 or 3,000 (a common size for today's high schools). The result will usually be rejection. "The bigger the schools get, the more people who are marginalized," says education researcher Kathleen Cotton.

Not only do a higher proportion of students in small schools join in extracurricular activities. "They have an ability," says Cotton, "to fill more important roles." That certainly rings true with me. Despite being nervous in front of groups, I served as president of my class one year, as editor of the yearbook, president of the debate club, president of the chess club, and as Barry Goldwater's representative in the school's 1964 mock presidential election. In a small school, show some enthusiasm or a little ability and you have plenty of chances to prove your mettle. As Cotton says, "In a small school, you can be *somebody*."

At the same time, small-school students benefit from closer ties with teachers. Deborah Meier, author of *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem*, points out that teachers who deal with a limited number of youngsters learn how to read their moods and understand how to communicate with them. This encourages teachers to expend extra effort. At Wesleyville, math teacher Anthony Foffi sometimes came in early or gave up his lunch hour to help a student who was having trouble. Wittenberg, who came from a family with difficulties, remembers Doris Johnson, the plump history and social studies teacher who lived three blocks from the school, as possessing an uncanny ability to sense his needs. "When my father wasn't in a position to help me," Wittenberg says, "Miss Johnson would ask, 'Are you doing anything this weekend, Bill?' I'd say no, and she would ask, 'Could you come by and do my windows?' And when I'd washed a few windows, she'd give me a $20 bill—which was a lot of money in those days."

It's not that teachers in big schools have less generous souls. They simply cannot get to *know* a large number of students. If teachers are to act on their best instincts, they need an environment that fosters closeness.

Meier, who led a low-income, mostly Hispanic and African-American high school in Harlem to impressive academic achievement, says small size is also a key to effective school governance. Only when the number of teachers in a school is small can they hash out policies and procedures together and avoid the bureaucratization that deadens big institutions. "We can reschedule one afternoon and put a new agenda into practice the next morning. We can undo them just as fast," Meier writes. "Changes don't require Herculean coordination or time-consuming bureaucratic arranging."

A small faculty can assess one another's work. "Only in a small school can teachers know who talks well but doesn't teach well, and vice versa," Meier observes. "They know who is late, who is unprepared, and who in quiet and unexpected ways comes through for their kids and colleagues." The ideal size of school, according to Meier, is one small enough so that all the teachers can go into one room and gather in a circle. When they can do that, the school is in a position to take initiative, refine its methods, and develop a distinctive character.

Yet schools continue to get bigger. From 1940 to 1990 the number of elementary and secondary public schools fell from about 200,000 to 62,037, a 69 percent drop–despite a 70 percent rise in the U.S. population. Officials go on trying to make schools more "efficient" through consolidation, as if the manufacturing sector's economies of scale could be applied to the education of human beings.

Harry Farnbaugh, who taught history and social studies at Wesleyville and later at Iroquois (which was about two-and-a-half times Wesleyville's size), insists bigger schools do have some advantages. Whereas Wesleyville had only the most rudimentary science facilities, "Iroquois had a *planetarium* and a full-time planetarium teacher, who taught adult classes in the fall," Farnbaugh notes.

Athletic facilities were far superior at the new school. Sports fields lay right out the door. At Wesleyville, by contrast, behind the school was only an asphalt playground. The football team had to walk three blocks down Eastern Avenue—past Messiah Lutheran Church, past a pizza joint, across busy Buffalo Road, and past Russ's Dinor (yup, that's the way they spell it), and other businesses—to reach the football field off Pearl Avenue in the poorer side of the borough. No coach would welcome that daily excursion. But come to think of it, the trek through the business area helped make the maroon-and-white-uniformed Bulldogs the *community's* team.

Our school so badly needed participants that some boys on the football team changed uniforms at half-time and joined the band. When the musical performance was finished, they would switch back and became football players for the game's second half.

Basketball facilities in Wesleyville were quirky. Wesleyville couldn't afford both a gymnasium *and* an auditorium in 1918 when the school was built, so the Bulldogs played in a peculiar combination facility—the basketball court actually occupying the school stage, elevated about four feet above the auditorium's floor. Sports reporter Doug Smith at the Erie *Times-News* used to write snidely about the "court on a stage" or—his alternative insult—the "matchbox court." Some people thought Wesleyville enjoyed an unfair home-court advantage: Visiting teams, they maintained, were afraid of running off the stage and falling to the auditorium floor. Maybe so. My own theory is that the Bulldogs had winning seasons in basketball (despite being the smallest school in the league) because the court's miniature size allowed the team to perfect its shooting game; the court was so small that the center circle touched the semicircles that extended from each of the keys. In four of the home games in 1963-64, the Bulldogs scored over 100 points. By the end of a game, the ears of everyone in the auditorium would ring from the shouting, whistling, clapping, and stomping.

We took low-budget sports facilities for granted. What mattered was that students who would have been relegated to spectator status at a big school got the thrill of contributing at little Wesleyville.

After every basketball game, a well-muscled student from Wesleyville such as the handsome, stout-hearted Jim Langley would take on the opposing school's tough guy in a fist fight. The fight was almost as regular an event as the game itself. In retrospect, these battles were probably pretty tame. But antics like those, and small-town rivalries in general, struck the school consolidators as hopelessly parochial—just one more sign that something as crucial as the educational system of the leader of the free world should not be entrusted to local yokels. Big schools were the prescribed antidote, transferring power to professionals who understood education's true ends.

Too bad. The professionals turned out to be the agents of bureaucratic entanglement. Too bad, too, because small-school passions stirred intense local pride. When robust local rivalries waned, a void was created. People need things that bring meaning to their lives, and I suspect the disappearance of local enthusiasms made people more susceptible to substitute thrills like drugs.

Small-school events brought the community together, including adults who had no children in the school. At Wesleyville High, one man who cheered students on was the late Gus Dusckas, a tall, effusive Greek-American who ran Dusckas Funeral Home. Gus had a knack for bucking up others' spirits. He hired Wesleyville kids for political errands like distributing leaflets for county Republican candidates. He helped students find summer jobs. He was generous with money. He acted as Wesleyville's benefactor.

Not everything was wonderful. The small number of students limited the range of instruction. Only two foreign languages were taught at Wesleyville: Latin and a dubious French. Every student from the quickest to the slowest shared the same English, history, and science classes. On the occasions when everyone in a 30-person English class took turns reading paragraphs aloud from *Silas Marner* or some other torpid novel, I was astonished by how haltingly some kids picked their way through the text. Wesleyville had no Advanced Placement courses. Harry Farnbaugh, a teacher of serious mien who enriched our "Problems of Democracy" class with excerpts from *The New Republic* and *U.S. News & World Report*, outspokenly told us that the school was not as innovative as it ought to be. He was probably right.

Yet we came out of that small school well-motivated. The 59 individuals, from a range of white-collar and blue-collar families, have accomplished much more than school consolidators might have expected. Howard Roth, whose father worked as a foreman at the GE plant, earned a Ph.D. and by his forties became the chief economist of the nation's fourth largest bank. Nancy Coleman, the brainy daughter of a plumber, settled in the Washington area and played a key role in the public relations and media campaign against the Supreme Court nomination of Robert Bork. Mark Ripley, a quietly industrious Eagle Scout whose father was the borough secretary, has carried out challenging assignments across the country for GTE and its cellular phone service. Bill Saxton, son of a Wesleyville teacher, became a campus minister to international students at Penn State after serving in, among other places, Calcutta with Mother Teresa's organization. I lost track of the bitter boy who used to arrive late, supposedly from a reformatory, with a pack of cigarettes bulging from the arm of his T-shirt; the teachers may have been unable to save him from what looked to be a hard road. But the majority of the class seems to have done all right, and some have performed outstandingly. A number of classmates achieved successful careers in engineering, law enforcement, and the military.

Meanwhile, the national results of consolidation have also been tallied. In extensive research conducted mostly in the 1980s and '90s, small schools have overwhelmingly been found to generate better outcomes among students. Small-school students "experience a much greater sense of belonging," Kathleen Cotton wrote in a 1996 report that summarizes the results of more than 100 studies and reviews. Attendance and dropout rates are better in small schools. "Not only do students in small schools have higher attendance rates than those in large schools," says Cotton, "but students who move from large schools to small, alternative secondary schools generally exhibit improvements in attendance."

Social disruption? Students in small schools commit fewer infractions, major or minor, says Mary Anne Raywid, a professor emerita at Hofstra University. "The states with the largest schools and school districts have the worst achievement, affective, and social outcomes," Cotton observes. Raywid says research shows that "students learn more and better in small schools." They progress toward graduation more rapidly and are more satisfied with their school. All this, says Raywid, "is particularly true for disadvantaged students, who perform far differently in small schools and appear more dependent upon them for success than do more fortunate youngsters." Digests of many of the school-size studies have been compiled by the Education Resources Information Center's Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, in Charleston, West Virginia

(800-538-3742). The advantages of small schools hold firm whether the schools are rural or urban.

What is the best size for a school? Limits of 350 students for elementary schools and 500 for high schools have been recommended by the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. Some researchers have suggested an effective range is from 400 to as high as 800 or even 900, though 900 is rejected by others as too big. The low end of the range, which seems to produce the greatest community benefit but perhaps not the greatest individual achievement, is interpreted by some as suggesting 300 students for a school containing grades 10, 11, and 12, or suggesting 400 students for a school encompassing grades 9-12.

Supporters of consolidation have often contended that bigger schools are more cost-effective. That claim often is correct when measured in cost per student. But many of the students attending enormous high schools—New York City has high schools whose enrollments approach 5,000—drop out. A better measure is the *cost per graduate*. By that standard, small schools come out less expensive.

Cotton, like many other researchers, believes size is a crucial factor for any improvement that people want to make in public education. As long as students continue to be herded into big schools, other approaches to school reform are, she says, "like rearranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*."

Existing oversized schools can be, and increasingly are being, subdivided into "small schools." Each small school doesn't need a separate building. Meier argues that what's important is that each small school have genuine autonomy. The school must have the power to hire and fire faculty and staff and the ability to make a whole range of decisions without the interference of a larger bureaucracy. Small schools can also band together to deliver certain services they cannot provide adequately by themselves.

Michael Klonsky at the University of Chicago has started a Small Schools Workshop to help people organize and maintain small schools. New York and Los Angeles have also shown strong interest in small schools. "The small-school movement, whether we're talking about charter schools or small public schools coming into being, has been experiencing a real groundswell," Cotton notes.

Reversing the trend toward large centralized schools will require determination. "The big, mindless high school, no matter how dysfunctional, has many fans, including kids," cautions Meier, who now heads a 150-student K-6 charter school in Boston. "When we talk with school officials and local politicians about restructuring large high schools, the first thing they worry about is what will happen to the basketball or baseball teams, the after-school program, and other sideshows; that the heart of the school, its capacity to educate, is missing, seems almost beside the point."

But failure has been a stern teacher. America now has plenty of proof that bigger and more centralized is not better. Now the nation needs to act on that knowledge, state by state, district by district, school by school.

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Selected Readings on School Reform

Higher Education

U.S. institutions of higher education continue to face many challenges posed by incoming freshman who have not been well-prepared by the K-12 system. In "Moving On To College, Going Back To Basics," Steve Twomey of the *Washington Post* describes the trouble that Montgomery College English instructor Jack Saruda and others are taking to raise the basic skills of college freshmen to the high school level.

Taking the other side of the remediation debate, Baruch College Provost Louis Cronholm suggests (and we tend to agree) that only by ending remedial education in postsecondary institutions can colleges help spur needed reform at the K-12 level. Read his explanation in "Why One College Jettisoned All Its Remedial Courses," published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. In a similar vein, Linda Chavez argues in the *Denver Post*'s "The 20 Percent Solution" that affirmative action—including its new forms currently taking root in Florida, Texas, and Georgia—are distractions from the underlying problem: the poor state of our elementary and secondary education system.

Fortunately, not everyone needs remediation. At the other end of the spectrum, we find top students being wooed by competing colleges and universities. Debbie Goldberg illustrates the lengths to which universities will go to get the best. In the *Washington Post Magazine*'s "The Scholarship Game," she describes the packages that top schools put together to attract those who score well.

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The Washington Post, September 23, 1999

Moving On to College, Going Back to Basics

Many Students Need Remedial Courses

By STEVE TWOMEY
Washington Post Staff Writer

Jack Suruda, a college instructor of English, has just tested a batch of his fall students. All but a handful own a 1999-model diploma from a Cadillac school system—Montgomery County's—and traditionally Suruda launches each semester by plumbing abilities.

Scattered on a table are the students' answer cards to a multiple-choice challenge. Suruda picks up each card, scans and scribbles, tabulating depth of vocabulary and grasp of written passages. History tells him what's likely to come next—he's been at Montgomery College 22 years—but his distress is apparent nonetheless as the harsh numbers add up.

"Whoa," he says to one result.

"Phew," he says to another

"Geez," he says to a third.

Not all 22 class members took the entire test, but of the 17 who did, none demonstrated skills commensurate with 12th grade. Most of these college students can do no more than seventh-grade work, some no more than fifth-grade.

The comma? An alien form, Suruda says. Spelling? They offer him "listing" for "listening" and "memeries" for "memories." They have trouble organizing thoughts on paper; they compose sentences of rudimentary structure, and they struggle with grammar, he says.

So they have commenced college life, not with dreamy explorations of new intellectual heights, but by visiting basic lessons no one made them master before passing them on to the future, not even Montgomery County's legendary public school system.

Tested and found wanting by Montgomery College, the students have been told that to ensure their own success, they must begin the pursuit of their college degree in Room 252 of the Humanities Building on the college's Germantown campus, in Suruda's.

"Today," he announces on day two of the fall semester, "we're starting with these units on subjects and verbs."

"It's like in elementary school, like in language arts, like in fourth grade," Jennifer Oliphant, 19, a graduate of Gaithersburg's Watkins Mill High School, says of Suruda's class. But, she says, "I'm kind of glad, because I really need it."

Sean Tobin, 18, who attended Quince Orchard in Gaithersburg, got a GED and now must spend time with Suruda, says he was "mad at first," but now believes that had he been put in a college-level course, "I wouldn't have known anything."

Suruda's is one of 35 entry-level remedial English courses listed in Montgomery College's fall schedule—and one of thousands of remedial courses at colleges nationwide, involving tens of thousands of students, new and returning. Most are at community colleges like Montgomery, whose schedule also included 25 entry-level remedial reading courses and 58 remedial math courses, although the college prefers the term "developmental."

Such courses have become a troubling barometer of how well public school systems are priming students for higher education, a destination that might have been a nice option in times past but is virtually a necessity in a high-tech world.

Given that nearly half the area public high school teachers surveyed by The Washington Post in the spring said a diploma from their school was no guarantee that a student knew the basics, and a third felt social promotions were at least "fairly common," it's not surprising that many graduates wind up needing help in college. Still, there are those who wonder whether colleges should have to fix the problem.

"Academicians, trustees, legislators and average citizens have questioned the wisdom of providing a service in college that supposedly was paid for in elementary and secondary school," the Maryland Higher Education Commission said in a 1996 study of remedial education in the state. "These voices have become more frequent in a period in which higher education has to compete with other state priorities for limited resources."

Maryland public colleges spent $17.6 million on remediation in fiscal 1995, the most recent total available. Virginia officials estimate remedial courses cost $40 million. The University of the District of Columbia estimates it spends about 5 percent of its budget, $1.2 million, on such courses.

Most of the costs must be picked up by taxpayers, because tuition covers only about two-fifths of instructional costs, according to Mark C. Hampton, director of institutional research for Virginia's State Council of Higher Education. That burden even led to an unsuccessful legislative attempt in Florida to require public schools "to reimburse colleges for the cost of remedial courses for their graduates," the Maryland Higher Education Commission report noted.

New Maryland figures released Tuesday show that of its 1997 high school graduates who enrolled in a Maryland college, 27 percent—4,240—needed remedial math. Fifteen percent had to take remedial English, and 17 percent remedial reading. (Some students take more than one course.)

In Virginia, 25 percent of the 1997 public high school graduates needed at least one remedial course when they got to a state-supported college in the commonwealth. The University of the District of Columbia says "less than 10 percent" of its 5,300 students are in classes specifically designated as remedial.

That's not an entirely distressing portrait of college reality. Thousands of remedial students—more than half in Virginia, for example—are adults seeking to improve minds and résumés after a hiatus from formal learning and wanting to brush up on rusty skills. For others, English is not their native language, and, understandably, they need help.

What is controversial is remediation for non-immigrants fresh out of high school. Cliff Adelman, a senior research analyst for the U.S. Department of Education, says many factors—such as behavior and family life—can explain why a student isn't ready for college. But, Adelman says, don't let school systems "off the hook."

"If the school systems can't prepare them for some sort of post-secondary education ... then they are not doing justice by their students," Adelman says. "The family has every right, and their states have every right, to go out and hang them."

Sharon Teuben-Rowe, an assistant professor at Montgomery College's Takoma Park campus, says incoming students are often "shocked" when told they must take remedial classes like hers. They think they can read. And they can, she says. What bedevils them is *interpreting* what they read. They'll often miss nuance, humor or sarcasm.

If they read a passage about violence in the schools and are asked what the author's intent was, they'll reply, "He's telling us about violence in the schools," Teuben-Rowe says.

When it comes to math, Susan King says, "I'll tell you what they have trouble with: fractions, word problems, percents. Which are basic topics." King, who teaches "pre-algebra" at the Rockville campus, says that if asked to add fractions—1/4 and 1/2, say—they might add numerators and denominators, coming up with 2/6, instead of the correct 3/4.

With perhaps surprising candor, many students blame themselves for their shortcomings. They didn't take school seriously, they say, and did no more than the minimum.

"I didn't really do anything in high school," says Eric Hickerson, 18, a graduate of Quince Orchard and now a member of Suruda's class. "I wouldn't be in a class like this if I'd paid attention. I partied too much."

Says Suruda: "They're humble. They're not really resentful. They say, 'I really need you. You have to be patient with me, Mr. Suruda.' "

A big, expressive man of 60 who crackles with enthusiasm after 34 years of teaching, Suruda doesn't dwell on why or how his students got to this point. He merely seeks to help them now. Indeed, many educators say remedial classes are a sign of something good: Students haven't given up. At a direct cost to themselves in the form of tuition, they are reaching higher, having perhaps recognized belatedly the value of college.

"A lot of them will say, 'This is the first time I've understood math,' " King says, and they thank her. "I tell them, 'It's not me; it's you, because you are ready to do it now. You weren't in high school.' "

In some ways, that makes teaching a remedial course easier than teaching a high school level course. Suruda, in fact, sympathizes with the task facing high school teachers: too many students, too many of them lacking motivation.

But for all the willingness of students to blame themselves for being in remedial classes, "it's our fault, too," says Nancy S. Grasmick, Maryland's superintendent of schools.

Once upon a time, high schools weren't geared toward preparing every student for college. Many could graduate to a factory job and be fine. But, Grasmick says, "those jobs are absolutely disappearing in the 21st century."

Aware of that, many students who might have been content to stop after a high school diploma are heading for college—only to find they aren't ready. It's as if course requirements and grading standards in high schools haven't been retooled to meet the times by making it impossible to coast to graduation with D grades or simple course loads.

But now Virginia and Maryland are raising the graduation bar, implementing tough new tests designed to find students with problems and provide them help on the assumption that all students need to emerge ready for some form of post-secondary education.

In addition, Mary Helen Smith associate superintendent for instruction and program development in Montgomery County, says "a dialogue is about to begin" in her school system about what defines "successful completion of a course." Smith, who says low grade-level abilities of county graduates at Montgomery College are "not good at all," also notes that her system now has "a formalized partnership" with Montgomery College to make transitions seamless.

"I'm the Pollyanna here," Grasmick says, "but if we can achieve our purpose with these high school assessments ... if we can literally end social promotion, if we can provide for the support systems ... if all that comes together, you would hope there would be no student entering college who requires remedial education."

The Chronicle of Higher Education,
September 24, 1999

Why One College Jettisoned All Its Remedial Courses

By Lois Cronholm

A RECENT REPORT by a commission to study the City University of New York has reignited the debate over the role and value of remediation in higher education. Among other recommendations, the report urged CUNY to limit remedial education exclusively to its two-year colleges, backing a policy that had already been adopted by the Board of Trustees and that will begin to take effect in January.

Yet, well before Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani's commission issued the report, and without any requirement by the trustees, CUNY's Baruch College removed remedial courses on its own initiative. Based on my firsthand experience as provost and then interim president of Baruch when we made and carried out that decision in 1998—and my examination of remediation from many perspectives over the past 20 years as a senior administrator at other major urban universities—I have concluded that offering pre-collegiate work in colleges and universities is a grievous error.

I respect the good intentions of those who advocate remediation. It is comforting to visualize remedial students in a kind of seamless progression, moving through their remedial classes, into college-level work, on to graduation, and then into profitable postgraduate careers. That is the view from 30,000 feet. But, on the ground level, the effect of remediation on the students and the institution can be devastating.

Proponents of remediation argue that the benefits of the practice outweigh the costs. It's true that, even though the success rates of remedial students are below those of students who start out prepared for college-level work, some of them do benefit—they graduate and go on to highly successful careers. As a citizen and human being, I feel very good about those successes.

But can those achievements alone justify the burdens of remedial work? Given the thousands of hours that colleges and universities invest in remediation, it is not surprising that some success is achieved. Even the limited success, though, comes at excessive costs—far beyond those measured in simple dollars and cents—for faculty members, students, and our entire system of public higher education.

Curricular deflation and grade inflation are two of the highest costs we pay. Teaching underprepared students unquestionably lowers standards; I defy anyone to find a faculty member offering regular college courses who would say otherwise. I'm not talking about less-traditional students, such as immigrants or persons who have been out of school for many years. Returning adults and immigrants struggling to learn a new language confront hurdles that traditional students do not. In fact, I do not oppose the special programs that colleges and universities have set up for those groups. By "underprepared," I mean those traditional students who come to college unable to add fractions or read a book used in eighth grade.

I conducted my first studies of remedial students almost 20 years ago at the University of Louisville, and have repeated those studies at Temple University and at Baruch. In each instance, I found that the great majority of students attending remedial programs are indeed traditional college-age men and women with high-school diplomas. Yet those diplomas do not begin to signify the level of academic achievement required for the students to succeed in even the most basic college courses.

Too often, administrators—under pressure from legislators and members of the public—blame faculty members if they fail to pass those students in regular courses. Too often, the public castigates entire colleges for a poor graduation rate when policy requires them to admit underprepared students. Small wonder that many institutions eventually lower their standards for graduation as they attempt to meet the impossible conditions thrust on them.

Remediation unquestionably imposes heavy costs on students. It has a demoralizing effect on well-prepared students who are in the same classes as remedial students. Worst of all, remediation hurts those students whom it is meant to benefit. Most remedial students receive some form of tuition assistance that requires full-time attendance in credit-bearing courses. Yet remedial students who are required to sign up for college-level courses often fail those courses. And, as a cohort, they end up with significantly lower grade-point averages than other students in those classes.

Imagine if we were coaching athletes in the high jump, but we didn't tell them that in order to succeed they must get a running start. And then, to compensate for their lack of preparation, we simply lowered the bar. What would be their chances of success when they had to compete against properly prepared athletes?

There are other hidden, but measurable, costs. Laurence Steinberg, a psychology professor at Temple University, noted last year that his institution's requirement for two semesters of psychological statistics for majors is not a cause to celebrate high standards. Rather, it is an admission that it now takes two semesters to learn what used to be done in one, and that students now get eight college credits instead of four for the same level of knowledge. If, as a country, we had that level of monetary deflation, we would declare ourselves in a depression.

OVER THE LAST 30 YEARS, we have seen a massive disinvestment of tax dollars in public higher education. That is the reason we have crowded classes, and students who increasingly cannot find even required courses regularly in the schedule, to say nothing of the courses formerly available solely for intellectual enrichment.

Remediation may not be the sole cause of the decline in the quality of public higher education, but to the taxpayer, it has become the foremost symbol. Educators claim that the problem with education is the lack of resources, but the public believes that the problem with education is the lack of academic integrity. And the public is not going to give educators resources until it is convinced that education is a good investment for society.

What can be done? To me, the fundamental issue is that we are looking in the wrong place for the answers. We are focusing on students, when we should be re-examining our entire educational system.

The theory behind remediation is that underprepared students are quite capable of succeeding in a rigorous high-school program. Think about it: Why else would it be assumed that they will succeed in a remedial program in college?

We cannot do an experiment and see what happens when we take a group of students, control for all variables, and then intentionally place half of those students into a high school with a good record for graduating students with strong skills and half into a high school with a poor record. However, since that is what happens in effect to students as they are assigned by district, we can retrospectively study the differences between graduates based on the schools they attended.

In establishing our policies, Baruch administrators did just that: We attempted to correlate the various characteristics of the students with the schools from which they graduated. We discovered that students with similar backgrounds—economically, socially, culturally, geographically—who differ only in which high schools they attend have vastly different outcomes upon graduation. We found that the majority of students from certain schools require remediation while many students from other schools do not. Those findings allow me to predict that many remedial students would have been successful at an earlier stage—and perhaps would not have needed remediation at all—had they attended a different school.

The fact that remediation is not more effective in correcting the deficiencies of students from certain schools points to one of my deepest concerns: The public's agitated insistence on maintaining remediation may be obscuring fundamental issues of brain development and cognitive maturation. For example, in *The Language Instinct*, Steven Pinker, a cognitive scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, describes students' diminished ability to learn language skills as they age. Despite the seemingly infinite procession of new theories of education, over many years we have developed some common understanding of what should be taught at various grade levels.

Given that we have found that students from some high schools seldom need remediation, and given that we assume that remedial students can do the work if they are in the right learning environment, why are we focusing on remedying the student's education at the college level? Wouldn't it be far better if we focused on changing the elementary- and secondary-education system so that students master the knowledge they need at the most appropriate ages, based on specific learning aptitudes and abilities?

For more than 20 years, I have heard the argument that we must give ourselves time to reform our K-12 system. Yet, that *laissez-faire* approach is one reason why the system has not been reformed. The only way we can change the status quo—and the current excessive need for remediation of high-school graduates—is to reserve college for those who can do college-level work.

Much of the controversy surrounding the CUNY report concerns the relationship between remediation and open enrollment. I believe that the need for remediation in college is, in fact, a repudiation of the practice, if not the principle, of open enrollment. Our country's great urban universities were created to open their doors to anyone prepared to work hard for a college degree, regardless of economic background, religion, or ethnicity. Public education was promulgated as a "leveler" to produce educated individuals from all strata of society. But that policy was based on the assumption that a high-school diploma represented mastery of high-school subjects; for this principle to work, public colleges and universities had to have the same high standards as private colleges and universities. It's inevitable that public institutions won't be able to fulfill the original principle of producing equally educated persons from all social and economic backgrounds if we must accept all students with a high-school degree—including those students whose lack of preparation would exclude them from any private institution.

Today, more than ever, we need high standards in elementary through graduate school, if we as a country are to maintain our place in today's changing world. We must demand more, not less, of educational institutions.

That is the fundamental reason why Baruch raised its admissions standards and removed remedial courses from the curriculum last year. We did not drop remediation to save money. We intensified our summer programs to help prepare incoming freshmen to meet the new standards.

IN ADDITION, Baruch now tests sophomore, junior, and senior high-school students to see if they are on track to meet its admissions requirements. If they are not, the college offers extensive work in their schools, with their teachers, so that when they get their high-school diploma, it will truly indicate that they are ready for the next level of intellectual challenge. The total costs of those efforts are similar to what Baruch used to spend on remediation for more than half of its student body.

We adopted the current approach because we were convinced that it was the rational way to prepare students for college. And it is the way to protect the legacy of Baruch as a haven for all students—regardless of their color, religion, or net worth—who enter classes prepared to reap the precious benefits that only a rigorous college education can confer.

The results? Baruch was the only senior college at CUNY whose enrollment increased last year—from 10,968 to 11,380, or almost 4 per cent. If you visit Baruch, which has one of the most culturally diverse student populations in the country, you will see the same motivation in the students today that was there decades ago, and you will find faculty members unusually enthusiastic about their students. The institution is a powerful rejoinder to today's focus on esteem as a self-contained concept severed from accomplishment. Baruch's enthusiasm comes from a student body and faculty who know that real self-esteem comes from meeting a real challenge.

I urge administrators at both high schools and institutions of higher education to work together to reform the system, and bring an end to ill-advised attempts to reform the student. When pre-collegiate institutions know that public colleges and universities have justifiable standards that they hold inviolate, K-12 schools will behave toward public institutions as they do toward private colleges and universities—and adjust their standards to insure the ability of their students to attend. When students and families see that public colleges and universities mean business about reforming the system, they will know what they must demand of the schools and of themselves. And we will return public higher education to its rightful role in securing the American dream for future generations.

The Denver Post, December 1, 1999

THE 20 PERCENT SOLUTION

Linda Chavez,

WASHINGTON - Remember President Clinton's 1995 promise to 'mend affirmative action, not end it'? He did virtually nothing to turn that promise into policy - but now, a new group of menders has stepped into breach, promising to end racial preferences in college admissions while ensuring access to the best-qualified minority students.

The latest is Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who issued his own proposal a few weeks ago. He asked state colleges to quit using race as a factor in deciding whom to admit, but then urged them to change their policies to admit any Florida student who graduated in the top 20 percent of his high-school class, regardless of test scores. Texas and California universities have adopted similar plans, with the former opting to admit the top 10 percent of graduating seniors, and the latter the top 4 percent.

Have these reformers figured a successful way out of the affirmative-action morass? Or are they creating new problems and masking old ones? Racial preferences strike most people as wrong on their face. Giving extra points in the college-admission process to a black or Hispanic student because of his race or ethnicity seems no more fair than taking away points on those bases. But what about devising new rules that appear to treat everyone the same but really are intended to maintain a certain racial or ethnic balance?

If, for example, the University of Mississippi, which admitted its first black student in 1962, adopted a policy to admit only students whose great-grandparents had attended Ole Miss, we would know that the purpose of the new rule was to keep blacks out - even though race was never mentioned.

When it comes to race, intent counts. No matter how neutral - or clever - a policy appears, if its intent is to give some people an advantage and others a disadvantage because of their skin color, then, the policy is discriminatory, plain and simple. But what about these states' new plans? If the intent is to ensure racial balance - to put caps on the numbers of some groups in order to ensure a floor on the number of others - these plans aren't much different than the racial preferences that preceded them.

And there are other problems as well. Everyone knows that not all high schools deliver the same education. What's more, the worst schools tend to be concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods, and black and Hispanic students are far more likely to attend such schools. Graduating in the top 20 percent of the class - or even the top 4 percent - from a terrible school won't prepare the student to compete at a first-rate university, especially if the student hasn't taken the courses necessary to tackle college work, such as algebra. Texas has already discovered that many of its 10 percenters need remedial classes, and some lack even the requisite academic credit hours to be admitted to college.

And what about poor black and Hispanic students who have found their way out of failing public schools and manage to attend, say, a local parochial school? They'll be measured by tougher standards, and take a more challenging curriculum, but this could actually hurt their chances of getting into college in Florida, Texas or California under the new rules.

Let's say a low-income, Hispanic, public-school student graduates in the top 10 percent of his class with a B+ average, having tackled nothing more difficult than one year of algebra. His twin brother graduates from a Catholic school, having taken not only algebra, but trigonometry and calculus, plus four years of science and English literature, but manages only to rank in the top quarter of his class with a solid 'B' average. Which student would likely fare better at the University of Texas? Unfortunately, not the one guaranteed admission.

What needs mending isn't affirmative action, but education. It's time to end all public policies that treat citizens differently depending on their race and get serious about reforming our elementary and secondary education system.

Former Denverite Linda Chavez is president of the Center for Equal Opportunity, a Washington-based think tank, and was director of public liaison in the Reagan administration.

The Washington Post Magazine, October 24, 1999

The Scholarship Game

In the competition for top students, more and more colleges are playing 'Let's Make a Deal'

By Debbie Goldberg

WHEN GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY unveiled its freshman class this fall, there were 25 National Merit Scholars—students considered to be among the best and brightest, and most sought after by colleges and universities. It was a pretty good showing for GW, which enrolled 2,100 freshmen this year, and one made possible in part by the $15,000 annual award GW promised to each Merit Scholar—regardless of whether he or she needed the money.

"I don't know if we would attract the same number without the scholarships," says Michael J. O'Leary, senior associate admissions director for GW. "But I wouldn't be comfortable experimenting by dropping them. I know what we're doing right now works."

And it works not just for GW. Schools across the country are offering scholarships based on merit to entice highly desirable students who, without the extra inducement, might choose someplace else. While the nation's most prestigious colleges and universities are swamped these days with applications from valedictorians, class presidents and straight-A students, and therefore can reserve their money only for those who truly need tuition help, the vast majority of schools are like GW, hoping to win over as many cream-of-the-crop high school graduates as they can. And for good reason: The better a school's student profile—with higher SAT scores and more honors—the easier it can be in the future to attract students, faculty and alumni donations. So alongside need-based scholarships these schools are now offering some substantial golden lures.

Just ask Britt Harter. A 1999 Sidwell Friends School graduate, Harter had stellar grades and SAT scores, was captain of the baseball and basketball teams and editor of the literary magazine. Harvard and Yale both wanted him. But the University of Chicago decided to make a big play for him, too—and offered him free tuition for four years, worth about $100,000. "I thought, 'Wow, that's a lot of money,'" Harter recalls. Although Chicago was not originally one of his top choices, the offer made it a contender. In the end, he chose Yale, but not before giving Chicago serious consideration.

With the annual price tag at many private colleges now more than $30,000, it's no surprise that there's a growing backlash against paying full sticker price. "We stuck it to the consumer and jacked up the price of going to school," says Jeff Zellers, enrollment dean at Ohio's Muskingum College. "Now, we're playing all these games on the discounting side."

"Like April in a used-car lot," is how Stephen R. Lewis Jr., president of Carleton College in Minnesota, describes the feverish bargaining that occurs over top students. Small, private colleges like Carleton are caught in a bind in this competition. Without large endowments, they can't afford to jump wholesale into bidding wars for students. They're also feeling the heat from state universities, which not only have the advantage of lower tuition, but also can entice prospects with merit scholarships.

Making things even more competitive is the fact that many of the Ivy League schools and several dozen other selective, private colleges such as Amherst, Bates, Swarthmore and Massachusetts Institute of Technology have tinkered with aid formulas in the last two years to create better awards for students, generally resulting in fewer loans and more grants. Those colleges, which continue to tie scholarship money exclusively to need, say they weren't responding to pressure from other campuses. But Bates Vice President Bill Hiss acknowledges, "We can sure smell the competition."

According to guidance counselors at local public and private schools, top students are going after the financial bait dangled by such institutions as Emory University, the University of Rochester and the University of Maryland, which has bolstered its reputation in recent years by luring high achievers, in part with merit-based scholarships. At Maryland about a quarter of each class is getting merit-based awards, which run from about $1,500 annually to a full ride.

The dance to get the best students often doesn't end with a simple offer. "There are more negotiations on both sides for the most qualified and interesting applicants," says Nina W. Marks, college guidance director at the National Cathedral School in Northwest. Savvy families have gotten the message that money is available, and every April, when acceptance letters are mailed out, prospective students and their parents begin calling colleges seeking better financial aid packages or more scholarship money.

Some schools encourage students to send in competing financial aid or scholarship offers—even schools that award only need-based aid. While many admissions officers say they solicit the information merely to make sure they haven't misinterpreted a family's financial resources—there can be large variation even in need-based packages—others make it clear they'll match or beat a student's best offer.

Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh is one of those schools that encourage accepted students to send in competing offers. University officials then evaluate such factors as how desirable the student is, how Carnegie Mellon stacks up against other colleges being considered and how likely the student is to enroll anyway—and then decide whether to counter the offer. "There's a food chain in this business, and some schools are going to want some students more than I want them," says Bill Elliott, Carnegie Mellon's vice president for enrollment. The result? Last year, more than half the 800 or so students who sent offers from other schools got a counteroffer from Carnegie Mellon of up to $5,000 more money—and more than half of those students ended up enrolling. For Carnegie Mellon that's an above-average "yield."

Says Elliott, "It's good old market pressure. You can't do what you did 10 years ago in any business and survive successfully."

Some people aren't happy about the idea that higher education be run like just another competitive business when it comes to doling out financial aid, and worry that over time it will wear away the time-honored principle of making sure that all qualified students who want to attend college are given the money to help them do so.

"We're not responding to the Let's-Make-a-Deal environment," says Charles Deacon, dean of undergraduate admissions at Georgetown University, which offers only need-based aid. Of course, Georgetown doesn't have to woo students with money—with 13,232 applicants for this fall's freshman class of 1,475, the university rejected half the high school valedictorians who applied.

"Bribing kids to go from school A to school B doesn't seem a good use of money," says David W. Breneman, dean of the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education. "All the money spent diverting high-income kids is coming out of something, and it may knock needy kids out of higher education, or into second-tier state universities or community colleges."

At Virginia, hundreds of non-need scholarships are awarded annually to attract top-flight students and athletes. But with 12,474 undergraduates "our primary goal for the vast number of students is meeting need," says U-Va. Dean of Admissions John Blackburn. "I don't think we're on a slippery slope."

Still, nationwide in the last decade or so there has been a sizable increase in the amount of money going into merit scholarships. According to Kenneth Redd, senior researcher at Sallie Mae, the nation's leading provider of student loans, colleges spent $888 million in 1989-1990 for undergraduate scholarships not based on need; in 1995-1996 that amount had jumped to $1.8 billion. Concurrently, need-based scholarships by institutions went from $1.8 billion in 1989-1990 to $4.7 billion in 1995-1996. The largest provider of college aid is the federal government, which in 1997-1998 supplied $44 billion to students, including through scholarships and loan guarantees. The share of federal funding given to needy students has dropped from 86 percent in 1985-1986 to 61 percent in 1997-1998, according to Tom Mortenson of the Center for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.

Still, as Britt Harter's experience shows, it's far from clear how significant money incentives are and will become. No one, for instance, expects students to start leaving the Ivies in droves for better financial deals elsewhere. But for colleges below that top tier, the situation can be quite different.

Katie Shilton, who graduated last spring from T.C. Williams High School in Alexandria, had her heart set for years on attending Swarthmore. But when her acceptance letters arrived, Oberlin College dangled a $10,000 annual scholarship in front of her—and a free pint of Ben & Jerry's ice cream (Jerry is an Oberlin grad). The offer, she decided, was too good to pass up. "It's neat to know they really want you—it's very, very flattering." She hasn't looked back. ■

Grab Bag

First pick from our grab bag section is "Absence in the Classroom," a *USA Today* story by Fred Bayles. This article reveals that the idea of bringing market forces to play in education has caught on in at least one area: the hiring of substitute teachers. With more than 90% of U.S. school districts encountering difficulty finding substitutes, "temp" agencies, such as Kelly Services, are stepping up to take their orders.

Next up—that's why we call this section "grab bag"—in her *National Review* article, "A Taboo Erodes," Abigail Thernstrom suggests that academics have slipped due to an excess of inappropriately channeled racial sensitivity. Thernstrom believes it is time for frank discussion of the black-white achievement gap and ways of narrowing it.

As evidence that the education wars aren't confined to academic subjects, we offer an article about different styles of teaching piano. Greg Steinmetz's *Wall Street Journal* piece, "Practicing the Piano the American Way Horrifies the British," describes two diametrically opposed methods for teaching piano: the Brits believe in "direct instruction": every student learns the same scales and pieces in the proper order, drilling and practicing all the while. The American instructors are more concerned about—what else?—the student's individual needs and personal growth.

In an *Education Daily* piece entitled "Online Service Broadens Access to AP Coursework," Jonathan Fox reports that more students will soon have the opportunity to take these valuable classes online, which could level that playing field enormously.

In a perceptive *Wilson Quarterly* article, "The Parent Trap," Tom Loveless of the Brookings Institution zeroes in on how parents need to shoulder greater responsibility for their children's academic achievement. He questions whether parents are up to the challenges posed by new, high-stakes standards for their students and whether policymakers are keeping in mind that complacent parents could undermine their greatest efforts at reform.

Lastly, Tyce Palmaffy poses the question: "Are School Consultants Worth It?" in the *Investor's Business Daily*. He questions the authenticity of itinerant education "experts," in particular the celebrated Willard R. Daggett, who, according to Palmaffy, has hopped from school to school distorting not only his biography but also his expertise.

MJJ

USA Today, November 15, 1999

Absence in the Classroom

By Fred Bayles

This morning, an estimated 96,000 teachers will be marked "absent" in classrooms across the nation. They'll be out for the usual reasons: illness, personal leave or training. But the task of finding substitute teachers to take their places has become anything but usual.

The economy and demographic shifts have drained the usual pool of substitute teachers, creating critical scarcity of qualified substitutes throughout the country.

Some school districts are so desperate that they now hire people with nothing more than a high school diploma. Louisiana schools ask parents to step in as temporary teachers. Chicago has tried enlisting off-duty police and firefighters. School districts in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts have turned to temporary employment agencies to do the job. And, according to several education surveys, more than 90% of the nation's school districts have trouble finding substitutes.

"The main goal is often to get a warm body in there," says Max Longhurst, an education specialist with Utah State University's Substitute Teacher Institute, which studies trends and develops programs for substitutes.

A measure of the need came recently when Kelly Services, one of the nation's largest temp agencies, announced it was getting into the substitute teacher business. Kelly plans to recruit people through newspaper and radio ads, arm them with a teacher's handbook, an instructional video and two hours of training, then send them out to schools. A college diploma will not be required in most cases.

"We see this as a great opportunity," says Kim Osborne, a Kelly spokeswoman.

But the task could be daunting.

Some substitute teachers get less pay and fewer benefits than fast-food workers, and they can be asked to take over classes of students who are eager to test a stranger's authority. That often leaves school officials with substitutes who are untrained, inexperienced and occasionally dangerous.

Over the past two years, there has been a steady increase in the incidents of sexual abuse, drug dealing and even solicitation for murder involving substitutes.

Full-time teachers are away from the classroom so much these days that substitute teachers are having a growing impact on a child's education, administration and teacher union officials say. Emphasis on teacher excellence has added more out-of-class time for training for full-time teachers.

And the federal family leave law has given them more latitude to take weeks, even months, off to deal with family issues.

As a result, the Substitute Teachers Institute estimates that any student who finishes high school today will have had a substitute for the equivalent of a year of classroom time.

"We need to take a deeper look at the issue of educating students with untrained teachers," Longhurst says.

Better opportunities leave job pool empty.

The shortage of substitute teachers is due, in part, to a booming economy that offers jobs with better pay, benefits and peace of mind to someone who might otherwise face a day of combat with unruly students. The decline in substitutes also has its roots in the Baby Bust, the drop in the nation's birthrate during the 1970s.

"It was a time when we had more teachers to go around than there were classrooms," says Jaime Horwitz, a spokesman for the American Federation of Teachers, the union representing about half the nation's 2.5 million teachers. The lack of teaching jobs discouraged college students from majoring in education. Then, in the past three years, "we've seen this surplus population of teachers vanish," Horwitz says.

Recent college graduates with degrees in education, who were once a reliable part of the substitute pool, are now hired straight from school to fill full-time teaching jobs. Retired teachers also are turning down assignments in favor of better deals elsewhere in the workplace. So are others with some teaching credentials.

The school district for Saco and Dayton, Maine, recently raised substitutes' daily stipends by $10 a day to $60 to remain competitive with local fast-food restaurants. It turned out to be too little. "Burger King and McDonald's pay $ 68 a day, and they have 401(k)s," Superintendent Gerald Clockedile says. "The closer we get to full employment the harder it is to get people to step into a classroom for $ 60."

Substitute pay can range from $ 35 a day in some Louisiana parishes to more than $ 100 a day in some affluent suburbs in Illinois and New Jersey. The pay spread between districts can mean one school system has the buying power to hire well-qualified substitutes while a neighboring school is left with poorly qualified candidates.

"You wind up fighting over the same people," says Mick Starcevich, superintendent of a Cedar Rapids, Iowa, school district that formed a substitute pool with other schools to end the bidding war.

But for many schools, particularly those in rural areas or in tougher urban neighborhoods, it is hard to get substitutes of any experience. "Not everybody is willing to go into some parts of the city," says Carlos Ponce, chief of human resources for the Chicago school system. "It's not a question of racism. Sixty percent of our teachers are minorities. It's the perception of safety."

The result: "Schools are taking people they would never consider in the past," Horwitz says. "We're hearing horror stories from all over."

-- In Espanola, N.M., a substitute teacher was arrested outside a junior high with a syringe of heroin that she admitted she was trying to sell.

-- In suburban Houston, a substitute tried to recruit two 14-year-old students to kill her daughter's ex-boyfriend.

-- In Los Angeles, a substitute teacher is accused of stripping in front of a fourth-grade class. The next day, the man was substituting at another school. Word of his actions was not passed on to other schools in desperate need of substitutes.

School officials acknowledge the problem. They complain that it is costly, time consuming and ultimately frustrating to run background checks on applicants who often quit after a few days in the classroom. Michael Contompasis, chief operating officer for Boston's public schools, says his office can run up to 100 background checks a month, with limited results. "Background checks need to be as thorough as possible," he says. "But the issue is whether they go deep enough."

Schools Find Ways to Screen Substitutes

Frustrated over background checks that take up to six months, a Bennington, Vt., school board is considering a novel alternative: requiring applicants to buy handguns. The background checks for handgun purchases required by law take gun dealers just minutes because they can use a federal database. The check would cost the school district nothing.

When the school district finds a substitute teacher candidate now, it often has to wait until the next school year to use the person because the background check takes so long, according to school administrators.

Some schools have taken another tack, using specialized employment agencies to find and screen substitutes. Opus, a Wakefield, Mass., company, uses print and radio ads to find potential substitutes, then interviews applicants, runs background checks and even offers several hours of training before sending them on assignment.

"They're not certified teachers, but they're good substitutes who we teach how to teach from a lesson plan," says Michael Brooks, director of educational services at Opus.

One of the Opus substitutes is Robert Breen, a 48-year-old retired firefighter who never taught a course until last spring. But with a bachelor's degree in fire sciences and criminal justice and some graduate school level education courses, Breen has been in demand ever since.

While the pay is low-about $ 70 a day-Breen says he loves the work.

"It's not about money," he says. "It's about giving back to the community."

Filling in recently in a bilingual world history course at Salem, Mass., High School, Breen is a study in kinetic energy as he tries to get his 12 students interested in Julius Caesar with a dialogue that jumps from Shakespeare to the movie Spartacus.

Breen is vigilant for attempts to test him. "Don't try to stall me," he says, as students try to distract him from giving a quiz by asking questions and requesting extra paper and pens. "You have to come in here like it's a multiple-alarm fire," he says outside of class.

Substitute Teaching as a Field of Its Own

Education experts see people such as Breen as a possible solution to the substitute shortage. The Substitute Teaching Institute's Max Longhurst says the education system needs to regard substitute teaching as a specialty and train staff for the travails of walking into a new classroom every day.

"Pay is only one of the problems in attracting substitutes," he says. "Retention is another problem. If someone is prepared to deal with the different issues they're going to face, it's going to be a more enjoyable experience and they are going to stay at the job."

The Chicago school system is currently restructuring its substitute pool program, looking to establish a cadre of teachers who specialize in substituting. "Substitute teaching needs to be a profession unto itself," Ponce says. "We need someone who can go in like a relief pitcher and take care of any situation."

One of Ponce's relievers is Latrice Thomas, a 26-year-old history teacher who substitutes three days a week so she can spend more time with her 4-month-old daughter. Thomas is listed as a "full-time substitute," a new designation that gives her a little more money and a choice of assignments.

With a broad teaching certificate for kindergarten through 12, Thomas can jump into many different situations within a week. "It's not a problem because I'm pretty mean," she laughs. "Word has gotten around that you don't play with Ms. Thomas."

For administrators such as Ponce, Thomas' specialization is a prototype for tomorrow's substitute teacher.

"All of us are re-examining what a substitute should be," he says. "We have to differentiate between those doing true substitute teaching as opposed to those who are just holding down the fort."

National Review, **December 20, 1999**

▪ EDUCATION ▪

A Taboo Erodes

The truth about blacks and education

ABIGAIL THERNSTROM

PERK up, everyone. It's true that Jesse Jackson is doing his usual number in Decatur, Illinois. And the Justice Department is threatening to sue Massachusetts over its rigorous and carefully designed statewide tests because many black and Hispanic students do poorly on them. And yes, Al Gore and Bill Bradley both have had kissy-face meetings with the Rev. Al Sharpton. But in fact, it's not just the same old racial scene anymore. Not only is the status of blacks steadily improving; the winds of freedom are now blowing through public discourse on race related questions.

The shift is subtle, and easy to miss. But think about a phrase George W. Bush has used in two education speeches: "the soft bigotry of low expectations." The cruel (and racially indifferent) dumbing down of American educational standards in the name of racial sensitivity is an issue a handful of conservatives have long raised, and they paid a heavy price for doing so. But times have changed. The word is now out: Black and Hispanic kids do not know enough when they graduate from high school. They have been passed along from grade to grade by schools that pursue a callous, softly bigoted self-esteem strategy.

In its 1978 *Bakke* decision, the Supreme Court ruled that colleges and universities may consider race only as one of many factors in admissions decisions. No selective institution of higher education paid the slightest attention. Behind soundproof doors, race-driven admissions became the norm. The subterfuge worked for a while, but it couldn't last. Once the facts were exposed, the talk began, and it focused on the core problem: the tiny pool of black and Hispanic high-school seniors with strong SAT scores and high grades who could meet the regular admissions criteria at selective schools.

Frank talk, once started, is hard to stifle. It takes on a life of its own. The new intellectual freedom is evident in *The Black–White Test Score Gap*, an important Brookings Institution volume edited by Christopher Jencks and Meredith Phillips. The liberal credentials of Jencks and Phillips are in perfect order, but their voices (and those of their contributors) break with traditional liberal orthodoxy.

For instance, they assert unequivocally that it is lack of knowledge—not white racism—that makes for unequal earnings. They report that among 31- to 36-year-old men with cognitive skills above the 50th percentile on the well-respected Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test, the difference between black and white earnings is a mere 4 percentage points. College-graduation rates tell a similar story: Blacks are more likely to earn a college diploma than whites with the same 12th-grade test scores.

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Black poverty, racial segregation, and inadequate funding for predominantly black schools are standard items on the list of liberal explanations for black underachievement. Jencks and Phillips dismiss them all. Income inequality, they say, plays a very small role in black test performance; in fact, eliminating black–white income disparities would make almost no difference in the scores of young black children on a basic vocabulary test. Nor does a school's racial mix matter after the sixth grade; it seems to affect reading scores only in the early years, and math scores not at all.

The racial identity of the children in a district does not affect funding, the number of teachers per student, the teachers' credentials, or their pay. Schools that are mostly black, however, have teachers with lower test scores—in part, Jencks and Phillips forthrightly acknowledge, because black schools have more black teachers.

On the other hand, schools are less important than we sometimes think. According to Jencks and Phillips, parents count more:

> Changes in parenting practices might do more to reduce the black–white test score gap than changes in parents' educational attainment or income. . . . Cognitive disparities between black and white preschool children are currently so large that it is hard to imagine how schools alone could eliminate them. . . . Changing the way parents deal with their children may be the single most important thing we can do to improve children's cognitive skills.

This is a tough and startling message. More than three decades after the publication of *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, the Moynihan report that was so terribly distorted by civil-rights spokesmen, it is finally okay to raise the subject of black-family culture. Jencks and Phillips suggest social scientists take a close look at: "the way family members and friends interact with one another and the outside world"; "how much parents talk to their children, deal with their children's questions, how they react when their child learns or fails to learn something"; and "cultural and psychological differences." In other words, focus on what's going on in African-American homes. Economic and educational resources are far less important.

Jencks and Phillips might be dismissed as members of a tiny sect called "scholars with integrity." But they have unexpected—and important—company: the ever-cautious College Board. In January 1997, it convened a "National Task Force on Minority High Achievement." Among its members were Raul Yzaguirre, president of the National Council of La Raza, and Edmund W. Gordon, the principal author of the dreadful New York State 1991 curriculum guide, *One Nation, Many Peoples: A Declaration of Cultural Interdependence*, which prompted a ringing dissent from Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

The group contained no conservative voices at all, so its recently released report, not surprisingly, contains much predictable stuff. For example, it says that the end of racial preferences in some states has harmed the efforts of colleges "to promote the academic development" of minorities; that we're not spending enough on urban schools; and that racial and ethnic discrimination is holding back minority students academically. It indulges in the usual psychobabble about low black self-esteem and feelings of alienation from school.

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But the task force also breaks important new ground. The report links black and Hispanic wage levels to poor academic performance, and uses National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) statistics to make clear just how inadequately non-Asian minorities are doing. The document points out that the NAEP results display the same patterns as SAT scores, which correlate well with grades and class rank.

The task force describes the problem of underachievement as emerging "very early" and minces no words about the fact that black and Hispanic kids "at virtually all socioeconomic levels do not perform nearly as well on standardized tests as their White and Asian counterparts." In fact, the racial gap in academic achievement is widest among middle-class students from educated families. The scores of black and white youngsters whose parents lack even a high- school degree are more alike.

Proponents of preferential admissions often argue that underachieving black and Hispanic students will catch up in college. But the College Board report admits that the best predictor of academic performance is prior academic performance. Do well in high school, and success in college follows—although black students do worse than their SATs suggest they should. The report refers to the "cultural attributes of home, community, and school," and talks at length about the attitudes toward school and hard work that Asian parents transmit to their children.

There is obviously much overlap between the Jencks and Phillips volume and the College Board report. Both are moving beyond racial preferences as a panacea. In fact, the task force refers to "affirmative development"—a term that implies the need for multifaceted and sustained action to address a problem. No quick fixes, which depend on fudging inconvenient facts. The College Board hasn't given up on race-based programs; it explicitly embraces them. But implicit in the report is an acknowledgment that in many public institutions of higher education, preferences may not survive; and that, in any case, after 30 years of using preferences, black students are appallingly behind whites and Asians in basic, absolutely essential academic skills.

The College Board is no profile in political courage; it would not have issued this report had it not felt safe in doing so. This report—together with the Bush speech, Jencks and Phillips, and other recent writings and statements—signals a change in the framework of the race debate, at least when it comes to education, the nation's most important race-related issue. Tom Daschle can call the GOP "anti-minority"; Democrats can play the race card from now until November 2000 and beyond; but they cannot stop the old rhetorical order from continuing to unravel.

Change the discourse, and the old policies themselves are placed in jeopardy. The whole structure of going-nowhere race-conscious policies—whose proponents have been satisfied with good intentions but few results—may be crumbling. If so, we are seeing the first steps towards honestly and seriously addressing the undeniable problem of ongoing racial inequality. Better late than never. **NR**

The Wall Street Journal, November 12, 1999

Practicing the Piano The American Way Horrifies the British

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They Have Rigorous Methods; The U.S. Is Rather Loose Exponents of the 2 Molds

By GREG STEINMETZ
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

When it comes to piano teachers, Margaret Knight and Julia Kruger are two of the best.

From her home in southern New Jersey, Mrs. Knight has taught for 27 years. At age 61, she is trying to slow down, but she still has more than three dozen students. One of her students represented New Jersey in the Miss America pageant a few years ago, with piano as her talent.

In Austin, Texas, Mrs. Kruger has taught for 29 years, has 46 students and has written several books on piano teaching. Many of her students have won international competitions. "I eat, drink and sleep piano," Mrs. Kruger says.

Margaret Knight

But there is a key difference between them. Mrs. Knight is British. Mrs. Kruger is American. They don't know each other. But each knows about all she wants to know about how the other teaches piano.

"Americans want to do a lot of things and not do anything deeply," Mrs. Knight says.

"I'd like to see their dropout rate," Mrs. Kruger says of the British.

In America, no instruction method is recognized as superior to all others. Eager to motivate students and encourage individual expression, many teachers teach whatever they and their students decide is best. "We give students and teachers complete flexibility," Mrs. Kruger says. "A lot of it is about getting kids to be interested in studying." Positive reinforcement is essential.

Julia Kruger

In Britain, there is a national curriculum. Under a system going back to the days of Queen Victoria, students learn piano as they would learn karate. They drill the same sets of scales and the same pieces again and again. Once they pass a test for one skill level, they move to the next grade. They can keep going until grade eight. By then, they're equipped for Schumann's devilish "Arabesque" or a Brahms intermezzo.

The conflict isn't about which country produces the best pianists. The cream will rise anywhere. It's about what's best for children studying piano. The British believe that without a solid classical education, there isn't much point. Not only will children fail to play properly, but they will also miss the side benefits of confidence-building and learning about discipline. Many Americans believe that if students get frustrated and quit, there's even less point to the exercise. Besides, creativity and personal expression are important, too.

The different approaches can be seen in the way people talk about piano.

Ask an American how well he plays

Two Routes to Carnegie Hall

Continued From First Page

piano, and the question tends to become: What piece is he working on? Ask a Briton, and the person will give a number carrying the significance of a golf handicap. The same would happen in Singapore, Hong Kong or most others former British colonies that have adopted the system administered by the standard-bearer of British music education, the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music.

Associated Board examiners will visit 85 countries this year to evaluate half a million students, not just in piano, but in all the instruments one might associate with, say, the New York Philharmonic. Only a few thousand students are in America. But the Associated Board is working to change that.

Richard Morris, chief executive of the Associated Board, has no illusions about what he is up against. A few years ago, he broached the idea of national music standards with the Educational Testing Service, the Princeton, N.J., organization known for the SAT, formerly known as the Scholastic Aptitude Test. He was told American educators prefer community benchmarks rather than ones from on high. Then Mr. Morris went to various music schools, including New York's Juilliard School of Music. There he discovered music education is far less fundamental in America than in Europe. "We're treated like freaks," one school administrator told him.

So instead of a blanket marketing campaign, he is focusing on areas with large Asian communities including San Francisco, Los Angeles and the Flushing neighborhood in the New York City borough of Queens. Many Asian-Americans already have familiarity with the Associated Board from their homelands. "You're basically trying to win over the hearts and minds of teachers. That's a slow process," Mr. Morris says.

A Little Ethnocentrism

Mrs. Kruger, the American teacher, became acquainted with the Associated Board while on a trip to London. She found herself on the defensive as British teachers scoffed at the American passion for tailoring instruction to individuals. "It was such a point of issue that it was difficult to discuss the benefits," she says. During a speaking trip to Taiwan, she was scheduled to lecture the same week as a British teacher. The British teacher was offended by the presence of an American.

Some of Mrs. Kruger's students started with the Associated Board while living abroad. After they moved to America, they were glad to be done with it. One student, who had nothing but negative critiques through a series of Associated Board exams, was completely frustrated. "I haven't had anyone want to continue," Mrs Kruger says.

She concedes that there is some value in the British approach. In fact, as vice president of the National Guild of Piano Teachers, an American organization dedicated to piano instruction, she herself advocates exams. The guild will test 119,000 students this year. As is not the case with the Associated Board program, students can choose from a vast array of music for exam purposes. But she worries that the Associated Board program, by having a set curriculum, loses students who could be kept interested by offering a wider range of pieces.

Mrs. Knight, the British teacher, knows about the American system and the International Piano Guild firsthand. When she came to the U.S., she involved her students in the guild "out of desperation." In her mind, it had only one thing going for it. "It was better than nothing," she says.

I'm OK, You're OK

The guild's exam system left her cold. She noticed judges were relentlessly upbeat. One judge was so worried about offending students that he gave each of them roughly the same marks. Siblings got identical marks. "That finished me," Mrs. Knight says.

Ten years ago, she was talking to a teacher in Baltimore who had some materials from the Associated Board. "I was overjoyed," Mrs. Knight recalls. She got the name of the board's U.S. representative and immediately hurried home to call. She is now responsible for recruiting Associated Board teachers in Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Although she has induced a few Americans to sign up, she has had more success with Asians. She has also had luck with Russians. "They tell me it's the closest thing to what they had in the Soviet Union," she says, explaining that she means that as a compliment.

Like many Americans, Dena Blizzard started learning piano from a neighbor. When she wanted to get more serious, she turned to Mrs. Knight. But she was still so involved in cheerleading and with her friends that Mrs. Knight had to sit her down. "She told me it was time to choose between being a jack-of-all-trades or really good at something," she recalls. She got to grade six in the Associated Board and, after playing Beethoven's "Pathetique," became Miss New Jersey 1995. She despairs about the state of piano instruction. "There are people who have been studying 10 years but can't play anything," she says. "That's really sad."

Education Daily, November 30, 1999

Online Service Broadens Access To AP Coursework

More than half of American high schools offer Advanced Placement (AP) classes, which allow ambitious students to earn college credit in advance. But critics say that's not enough, considering the increasing weight such courses receive in the college admissions process.

A high-profile lawsuit in California has put a spotlight on the issue of disparate access to AP courses. Demanding access for all qualified and interested students, the ACLU argues that limited AP offerings in poorer schools hurt low-income students' chances of acceptance into public colleges (ED, Aug. 3).

Robert Vaughan, coordinator of the Seattle Public Schools' gifted and talented program, saw the same problem in his district and elsewhere in Washington state. Whereas some high schools offered several AP classes, others offered none.

His musings on how to bridge that part of the "digital divide" led to the arrival of one of this decade's more promising advances in education technology: online AP courses.

In hopes of solving the AP access gap, Vaughan mentioned one idea to a parent who happened to work for Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen: Allow online access to AP courses to meet "the needs of that motivated student who is ready to take an AP class but doesn't have a teacher."

Allen, now a venture capitalist that sees online education as one of Internet commerce's most promising fields, quickly spotted a business opportunity. In 1997, he founded APEX Online Learning with the goal of democratizing (and profiting from) access to AP coursework and exams, which are administered by the College Board.

After pilot testing last year, the Seattle-based APEX went fully functional this semester. Now, 300 students are enrolled in virtual AP classes (of up to 25 students each) through APEX's online network, and 18,000 students have used APEX to review for AP exams.

"We're going to make a major contribution to education," said Sally Narodick, APEX's chief executive officer. "Schools need to open their minds and bring distance-learning into the classrooms."

She sees isolated rural schools and underserved urban schools as the APEX's target market, as well as individual families and middle-class schools that simply cannot offer every type of AP class.

The company's biggest obstacle, she said, is access—even in 1999, not all schools are wired to the Internet or have adequate access for programs like APEX. But federal subsidies for online access and other initiatives are quickly changing that, she said.

APEX currently offers versions of four AP subjects: calculus, statistics, government and politics, and microeconomics (macroeconomics will be added to its catalog this spring). It hopes to roll out up to 12 more courses over the next five years and enroll thousands more students.

Seeding Opportunity

In all, the College Board offers 32 AP courses in 18 subject areas. Founded in 1956, the program is seen as one of education's success stories and a rare example of a rigorous, nationally accepted curriculum. Last year, over 700,000 students took more than 1 million AP exams (ED, March 16). Ninety percent of colleges offer credit for AP courses.

The courses, developed by AP instructors, college professors and multimedia experts, meet both College Board and University of California guidelines. APEX students who do well on AP exams receive the same college credit as "bricks and mortar" students.

Last year, students who participated in the APEX pilot program outdid their peers nationally: 87 percent of them scored a 3 or higher on AP exams (the threshold for college credit), compared with 65 percent nationally.

Instead of merely posting course material online and allowing students to "sink or swim," APEX has sought to create a virtual classroom where students receive individual guidance and support.

So far, the company employs 14 online instructors, who conduct online discussions and grade student work. Students correspond with their online instructor almost daily through e-mail, faxes, phone calls and live Internet discussions.

Using Technology For Good

Students must spend at least five hours online a week to remain in good graces with APEX. If a student falls behind in class, APEX notifies onsite mentors at each school. Mentors and parents receive e-mail reports on each student every week.

Each APEX class costs $395. Another program expanding access to AP courses is a relatively new federal grant program that pays the $75 AP exam fees for low-income students. In the recently approved federal budget, funding for the program jumped to $15 million from $4 million (ED, May 22, 1998).

Vaughan, who mentors 20 students in Seattle APEX courses, believes schools have a moral imperative to use technology to expand AP access because "we know it makes [students] successful when they go to college."

"It adds an ethically worthwhile twist to the Internet," he said. "It creates opportunity in schools with no history of AP classes."

For more information, contact APEX Online Learning at 110-110th Ave. NE, Suite 385, Bellevue, WA 98004; (800)453-1454; *e-mail: inquiries@netu.com; or apex.netu.com.*
—Jonathan Fox

The Wilson Quarterly, **Autumn 1999**

The Parent Trap

by Tom Loveless

A new kind of revolution of rising expectations is sweeping the United States. It is a revolution fomented by reformers who believe that setting higher expectations in the schools is the key to improving academic performance. There is bipartisan political enthusiasm for the creation of tough new learning standards. Just about everyone wants to end social promotion, the practice of passing a student on to the next grade regardless of whether he or she has learned anything. Reformers poke, prod, cajole, and coax schools to embrace lofty academic expectations which, they believe, schools would not adopt on their own. They are confident that such heightened expectations will yield dramatic increases in student achievement.

In focusing on the schools, however, reformers are taking for granted one of the most powerful influences on the quality of American education: the American parent. They assume that parents will do whatever is necessary to raise children's levels of achievement. But will they? Do parents really consider classroom learning the most important aspect of their children's education? What are they willing to give up so that their children will learn more? Will family life change as academic achievement assumes a more prominent role in education? Will political support for reform stay firm if parents recoil from the everyday costs?

There are indications that many parents may have trouble accepting the fact that improving education is not a pain-free exercise. In Virginia, when tough new statewide tests revealed earlier this year that only 6.5 percent of the schools met state standards, many parents (and others) responded with cries of anger and disbelief. Their anger was directed not at the schools but at the standards. There are other signs that parents' commitment to academic excellence is not very deep. A 1996 Gallup Poll asked: "Which one of the following would you prefer of an oldest child—that the child get A grades or that he or she make average grades and be active in extracurricular activities?" Only 33 percent of public school parents answered that they would prefer A grades, while 56 percent preferred average grades combined with extracurricular activities. (Among private school parents, the breakdown was almost the same, 34 percent to 55 percent.)

If the wording of the question is somewhat ambiguous, the importance of nonacademic activities in teenagers' lives is thoroughly documented in *Beyond the Classroom* (1996), a study of how American teens spend their out-of-school time, the portion of their weekly schedule (in theory at least) that parents directly control. Three nonacademic categories dominate, according to Temple University psychologist Laurence Steinberg: extracurricular activities, primarily sports, consuming 10 to 15 hours; part-time employment, 15 to 20 hours; and a host of social activities, including dating, going to the movies, partying, and just hanging out with friends, 20 to 25 hours. The national average for time spent on homework is four hours per week, not surprising given the few waking hours that remain after the whirlwind of nonacademic pursuits.

This distribution of teens' time represents a huge drag on academic learning. More than one-third of the teens with part-time jobs told Steinberg they take easier classes to keep up their grades. Nearly 40 percent of students who participate in school-sponsored activities, usually sports, reported that they are frequently too tired to study. More than one-third of students said they get through the school day by "goofing off with friends," and an equal number reported spending five or more hours a week "partying." And these self-reports probably underestimate the problem.

The big story here is that teenagers' time is structured around the pursuit of a "well-rounded" life. American families might value academic achievement, but not if it intrudes on the rituals of teen existence, especially part-time employment, sports, and a busy social calendar. This stands in stark contrast to the situation in other nations. In Europe and most Asian countries, it is assumed that the central purpose of childhood is to learn. Part-time employment of teenagers is rare, sports are noticeably subordinate to a student's academic responsibilities, and although there is plenty of socializing, it is usually in conjunction with studying or working with others on academic projects. The American student's four hours per week of homework is equal to what students in the rest of the industrialized world complete every day.

Significant cultural differences also appear in how parents judge their children's academic performance. A study by James Stigler of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Harold Stevenson of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, asked several hundred mothers from the United States, Japan, and China about the school performance of their fifth-grade children. More than 50 percent of the American mothers pronounced themselves very satisfied with their children's schoolwork, as opposed to only five percent of the Asian mothers. On tests measuring what these same children actually knew, however, the American students scored far below their Chinese and Japanese counterparts. When asked to explain their children's poor performance, the American mothers cited a lack of inborn ability. When the Japanese and Chinese children failed, their parents blamed the kids for not working hard enough.

American parents see academic achievement as a product of intrinsic ability rather than hard work, as just one of many attributes they want children to possess, and as something their own kids are accomplishing anyway. These beliefs, along with widespread peer pressure against academic excellence (who wants to be a "geek"?), an unrelenting strain of anti-intellectualism in American culture, and the weak academic demands of schools, combine to dampen the importance of academics for American youth and their parents.

We need not let educators off the hook, but parents bear some responsibility both for the lax standards in today's schools and for students' mediocre achievement. Parents appear more willing to embrace academic excellence in the abstract than to organize their family's daily life in order to achieve it. They enthusiastically support attempts to change schools in the abstract but are ambivalent when it comes to schools they actually know.

Polls show that parents believe their children's school have higher standards and are of significantly better quality than the nation's schools in general. This phenomenon—the idea that "I'm OK, but you're not"—also shows up in surveys on health care (my doctor is great, but the nation's health care stinks), Congress (my representative is terrific, but Congress is terrible), and the status of the American family (mine is in fine shape, but families in general are going to hell in a hand basket).

Such complacency undermines meaningful school reform. Raising the level of achievement is hard work. Unless children can actually learn more math, science, literature, and history without breaking a sweat, then the prospects for reforms that ask children and parents for more—more time, more homework, more effort—are not very good. We don't hear much about what today's educational reforms may require of families. Indeed, when it comes to the subject of parents, the rhetoric seldom gets beyond calls for more "parent involvement" or for "empowering" parents. Reforms that grant parents control over where their children go to school, a favorite of the Right, or that offer parents a stake in governing local school affairs, a favorite of the Left, may prove to be valuable public policies for other reasons, but they have not yet convinced skeptics that they will significantly increase student achievement.

In Chicago, an experiment that involved creating parent-dominated school "site councils" to oversee individual schools produced a few renaissance stories, but also tales of schools engulfed in petty squabbling. As vouchers and charter schools become more widespread, will parents actually take advantage of the opportunities to improve the education of their children? Buried in the national comparisons of private and public schools is an interesting anomaly. Despite well-publicized research showing that private schools outperform public schools on achievement tests, more students transfer from private to public school than vice versa at the beginning of high school, precisely the time when one's academic accomplishments really start to matter in terms of college and employment. Where other kids in the neighborhood are going to school and the desire to keep extracurricular activities close to home appear to weigh heavily in parents' choices.

Another reason to doubt that empowered parents will wholeheartedly insist on higher achievement can be found in the history of American schooling. Schools have always attended to the convenience of parents, and, as a result, cultivating the mind has simply occupied one place among many on a long list of purposes for the school. At the beginning of the 19th century, education came within the province of the family. Children learned reading at home, along with basic arithmetic and minimal geography, science, and history. Farming dictated the tempo of family life. Older students only attended school during the winter months, when their labor wasn't needed in the fields. At other times, even toddlers were sent to school, crowding classrooms with students from three to 20 years of age.

Later in the century, as fathers and mothers abandoned the farm for the factory and intermittently relocated in search of work, the modern public school began to evolve. One of its functions was custodial, providing a place for children to spend the day while busy parents earned a living. The magnitude of the change is staggering. As late as 1870, American students attended school only an average of 78 of 132 scheduled days; today's students spend more than 160 days in the classroom, and the modern school calendar runs to 180 days. More than 90 percent of school-age children now attend high school. At the beginning of the century, less than 10 percent did.

But the school's power is limited. Its monopoly over children's daylight hours never led to the recognition of intellectual activities as the most important pursuits of adolescents, either outside or inside school. Why do parents allow two-thirds of today's teenagers to work? After-school jobs are considered good for young people, teaching them a sense of responsibility and the value of a dollar. Most Americans think it's fine if teenagers spend 20 hours a week flipping hamburgers instead of studying calculus or the history of ancient Rome.

The development of young minds also finds competition in the school curriculum itself. For example, the federal government has funded vocational education since 1917. Americans have always expected schools to teach students the difference between right and wrong and the fundamental elements of citizenship. In the last three decades, schools have also taken on therapeutic tasks, spending untold time and resources on sex education, psychological counseling, drug and alcohol programs, diversity training, guidance on topics such as teen parenting, sexual harassment, and a host of other initiatives that have little to do with sharpening the intellect.

Some analysts maintain that parents don't support such diversions from academic learning, that these programs are nothing more than the faddish whims of professional educators. If so, parents have been awfully quiet about it. A more reasonable explanation is that, with parents busily working at two or more jobs, with many of these topics awkward for parents to discuss, and with parental authority showing its own signs of weakening throughout society, parents now look to schools to provide instruction that they once delivered themselves.

Schools are acting more like parents, and implementing real academic standards will probably force parents to act more like schools. They will need to stay informed about tests scores and closely monitor their children's progress. Parents of students who fall short of standards must be prepared for drastic changes in family life. Summers will be for summer school, afternoons and weekends for tutoring. This will cost money and impinge upon family time. Struggling high school students will be forced to spend less time on sports, to forgo part-time jobs, and to keep socializing to a minimum.

No one knows how parents will react to such changes. Higher standards are overwhelmingly supported in public opinion polls, but what will happen when they begin to pinch? In 1997, hundreds of parents in an affluent suburb of Detroit refused to let their children take a high school proficiency test, arguing that the nine-hour exam was too long and that it would unfairly label children who performed poorly. In Portland, Oregon, the school district invited the parents of 3,500 youngsters who had failed statewide proficiency exams to send the children to a summer school session set up at great expense and amid much hoopla; only 1,359 kids were enrolled. Every state has its share of stories. The elimination of social promotion presents the biggest test. Will the parents of children who are compelled to repeat, say, third or fourth grade, continue to support high standards? Or will they dedicate themselves to the defeat and removal of standards? In districts that see huge numbers of students facing mandatory summer school or failing to win promotion to the next grade, will parents push to water down tests and lower passing scores?

Some years ago, I came face to face with some of these implications when I taught sixth grade in a special program for exceptionally gifted, high-achieving youngsters, students approximately two years above grade level in all subjects. The curriculum was accelerated to the eighth- and ninth-grade levels, and I taught all academic subjects. Students applied for admission to the program, and my fellow teachers and I stressed that it wasn't for everyone. Parents seeking an education emphasizing creativity or the arts were advised to look elsewhere. An extremely bright student who hated doing homework would also have had a difficult time.

Getting to know the parents of my students was one of the most satisfying aspects of my job. They were actively involved in the school and indispensable in organizing field trips, raising money for computers, putting on plays, and doing anything else that enhanced their children's education. If ever a group supported lofty standards, this was it. But dealing with parents was not all sweetness and light. Grading policies drew the most complaints. One parent threatened a lawsuit because I gave a zero to a student who cheated on a test. In the midst of a three-hour, late-night phone call, a mother repeatedly told me that I would suffer eternal damnation because her son had received grades disqualifying him for admission to an honors program.

Complaints were also voiced because I didn't accept late homework—"We had friends over last night and Johnny simply didn't have time to do his history," one father explained in a note—or because I wouldn't excuse absences for family ski trips or a student's "R&R day" of TV soap operas and game shows. And these complaints came despite the fact that enrollment in the program was by choice, the school's reputation for academic rigor well known, and the policies on these issues crystal clear.

Such conflicts go with the territory. Anyone who teaches—and sticks to the principles making the career a serious undertaking in the first place—will experience occasional problems with parents. The usual conflicts stem from the different yet overlapping roles that parents and teachers play in a child's life. Both are concerned with the same individual's welfare, but their roles are not interchangeable. Parents are infinitely more important to a child's upbringing, but the teacher is usually the most significant nonfamily adult presence in the child's life and, ideally, is more objective about the child's interactions with the larger world. Teachers pursue goals established by society rather than the family. They must be warm and understanding, but they must also make decisions balancing the interests of 30 or more people who have work to accomplish every day in the same small space.

The differentiation of parent and teacher roles, which strengthened schools and families in the 19th century, may be at the bottom of many parents' unrealistic perceptions of their children's school experiences. Just as reformers are probably right that the demand for high educational standards must come from outside the schools, the imposition of academic burdens on children probably must come from outside families.

There is some evidence that parents intuitively understand this. In a recent study by the Public Agenda Foundation that examined how parents view their role in education, parents said that the most significant contribution they can make is to send children to school who are respectful, hard working, and well behaved. They do not want a bigger say in how schools are run. Nor do they want to decide curricular content or methods of instruction. They trust educators who have earned their trust, and they want schools to do their job as schools so that parents can do their job as parents.

These seem like reasonable sentiments. But in the same study, parents also admit that they absolutely hate fighting kids to get them to do their homework. They gauge how things are going at school primarily by how happy their children seem and nearly 90 percent believe that as long as children try hard, they should never feel bad about themselves because of poor grades. These attitudes are potentially in conflict with more rigorous learning standards. If social promotion ends, many children will be held back in a grade despite their having tried hard. And these children will be unhappy. Other children will not get the acceptable grades they once did. A lot of people are going to be very unhappy.

Higher standards and the end of social promotion now enjoy tremendous popular support. But the true test will come when words become deeds. Until now, raising expectations in education has been portrayed as cost-free. It isn't. Schools and students and parents will bear the costs. If parents are not willing to do so, few of the ambitious changes American reformers are now so eagerly pursuing will make much difference.

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Investor's Business Daily, October 22, 1999

ARE SCHOOL CONSULTANTS WORTH IT?

By Tyce Palmaffy, Investor's Daily

When Willard R. Daggett gave a day-long series of talks to the Grosse Pointe, Mich., school district last November, faculty, parents and students thought they were listening to a top expert in education.

Such an expert, in fact, that Grosse Pointe paid him $ 10,000 for the day -triple what respected education scholars usually get for speeches, several education consultants said.

A high school science teacher was skeptical, though. Among other things, Daggett had told the educators that the U.S. was the only nation that still taught chemistry and biology as separate courses. The teacher looked into it and found no nations that integrated the two subjects.

He sent a note to Gerald Bracey, a psychologist who specializes in education statistics.

Bracey was livid. In a 1995 article in the education journal Phi Delta Kappan, he had taken Daggett to task for talking at length about a study that Bracey couldn't find. None of the top scholars he had contacted knew of the study either. And the study's findings seemed implausible.

When he asked Daggett for the sources of that study and several other statistics, he got a letter from Daggett's lawyer. It said, in essence, that Daggett was too busy to help Bracey.

Yet here Daggett was again, spinning anecdotes and statistics in return for big bucks. Tax dollars, in fact. So Bracey sent Grosse Pointe's top officials a letter. It detailed several of Daggett's claims and Bracey's rebuttals, with his sources.

The district passed Bracey's concerns on to Daggett. Daggett replied with an eight-page letter that attempted to answer only a few of Bracey's questions. Even the answers he did give were mostly unsourced and full of information irrelevant to the questions Bracey had posed.

The district's response? In a written statement, district superintendent Suzanne Klein would only say, "Dr. Daggett continues to be a popular speaker in other school districts in our area." (Klein refused to be interviewed for this story.)

Grosse Pointe North High School Principal Caryn Wells, who pushed to invite Daggett to speak at Grosse Pointe after hearing him at a conference, said she was satisfied with Daggett's response. Asked whether she would invite him back, Wells said yes. District spokesman Kathy Roberts said Wells' viewpoint reflected the district's.

The problem, said several education scholars, is that Daggett is only one of dozens of self-described education experts who prescribe reforms that are based on shaky research. In some cases they are merely marketing whizzes who sell videos and books and provide training sessions, though they often do no research themselves.

"The education community is constantly and chronically taken in by any peddler of snake oil or witchcraft that comes down the pike," said Chester Finn Jr., president of the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and a former assistant U.S. secretary of education. "They just mutter words that educators like to hear.

"If you used the right buzzwords," added Finn, "you could turn yourself into a millionaire. Most of it is just hocus-pocus."

Daggett himself has spoken in dozens of districts ranging from Olathe, Kan., to Niagara Falls, N.Y. He's been a keynote speaker at a Kentucky Department of Education conference, the Midwestern Governors Association conference and the 1995 National School Boards Association annual conference. He's even given the graduation speech at Georgia Southern University.

The Center for School Leadership and the Kenan Best Practices Center at the University of North Carolina have set up a partnership with Daggett's firm.

Sam Houston, the center's executive director, said, "I've known Bill Daggett for years. I think (he) does very good work."

Daggett's firm lines up speaking and consulting engagements for Houston.

In Idaho, the J.A. and Kathryn Albertson foundation paid $ 175,000 to bring Daggett in for a series of talks and workshops with state educators. It also offered hundreds of thousands of dollars to districts that were willing to work with Daggett.

"He's very researched-based," Sharron Jarvis, the foundation's executive director, told the Idaho Statesman.

"I do like his perspective that we're a global economy."

The Hernando County schools in Florida paid Daggett $ 8,000 for a day-long speech in August 1998 and sent 10 educators to Daggett's Model Schools Conference at a cost of almost $ 10,000. The money came from a federal School-to- Work grant.

Hernando County superintendent John Sanders' reaction to Daggett's talk: "The content of his message is very pertinent to education today. I've been in the business for over 35 years. Much of what he had to say I've seen firsthand myself."

Maryland's Baltimore County schools took their 160 principals out of school to hear Daggett talk in 1997.

Pricetag: $ 6,000, from a federal grant.

"One wonders which is worse," a top education consultant who knows Daggett's work well said, "(Daggett's) flimsy work or the districts willing to pay him $ 10,000."

Daggett styles himself a global expert on school reform. He claims to have served on school-reform commissions in Germany and Japan and to have worked with reform efforts in districts on four continents.

Yet Harold Stevenson, an expert on international education systems at the University of Michigan, has never heard of Daggett and has no idea where he gets his international statistics.

Daggett claimed in a 1998 speech that 29 countries require four years of technical reading and writing in high school (i.e., learning how to read a computer manual). Two years earlier, he told an audience that 19 countries had that requirement.

"Even an expert wouldn't know the details of what happens in 29 countries," said Stevenson. Daggett said the statistics were based on his own travels.

After leaving his post as the director of occupational education for the New York State Department of Education, Daggett set up the International Center for Leadership in Education.

It now boasts a staff of seven and several "senior consultants," nearly all of whom have doctorates. Even Thomas Houlihan, the former senior education adviser to North Carolina Gov. Jim Hunt, is listed as one.

What about Daggett's own resume? In his speech to Grosse Pointe, he claimed to have been a university president and to be a trustee of two major universities. When pressed for their names, Daggett said he had been a professor, not a president. He has claimed to be a former university president in other speeches as well.

The two "major" universities he claimed to have been a trustee of: Northwestern Business Institute in Pennsylvania (not affiliated with Northwestern University) and, formerly, Kent College in Great Britain.

Daggett's speeches are a mix of futurism and warning. Some of his observations are vague: "Our children live in a technological information society pushed by global competition."

He tells faculty, students and parents that the skills needed for entry-level business are "higher and fundamentally different" than those needed to succeed in higher education.

For instance, he says, schools teach algebra, but high-skill jobs require knowledge of statistics, logic and probability. Also, schools teach kids to read novels, Shakespeare and poetry, he says, but businesses need people who can read technical manuals.

As proof that high schools aren't teaching much of value, he told Grosse Pointe that, according to College Board data, 68% of colleges don't require a high school diploma. How is this possible? Community colleges, he said, don't require diplomas, "bar none."

Renee Gernanda, who runs the College Board's database, said the College Board had never calculated that statistic. Asked to do so, she found that 25% of community colleges don't require diplomas. Daggett said her statistic was "wrong," but offered no proof.

Other gaffes included telling the audience that California has 21% of its kids in charter schools. The actually statistic was around 1%.

He talked at length about a "Harvard study" that took the top two seniors from 2,100 U.S. high schools and had them take the ninth-grade exams in math, science and social studies. Nearly 90% supposedly failed two out of three exams.

The problem: No one at Harvard's Graduate School of Education knew of the study. Daggett says he heard about it at Harvard, but didn't provide a source.

In a long talk on biotechnology, he told the crowd that Pfizer was able to invent Viagra, its wonder drug for erectile dysfunction, after scientists discovered the "gene domination" that causes male sexual dysfunction. Viagra has nothing to do with the human genome

The Indianapolis Star, November 19, 1999